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SUNlite

Shedding some light on UFOlogy and UFOs

The reaction, mentioned above, that after reading a few reports, the reader is convinced that "Flying saucers" are real and are some form of sinister contrivance, is very misleading. As more and more of the reports are read, the feeling that "saucers" are real fades, and is replaced by a feeling of skepticism regarding their existence. The reader eventually reaches a point of a saturation, after which the reports contain no new information at all and are no longer of any interest. This feeling of surfeit was universal among the personnel who worked on the project....

Bluebook Special Report #14 (p. 93)

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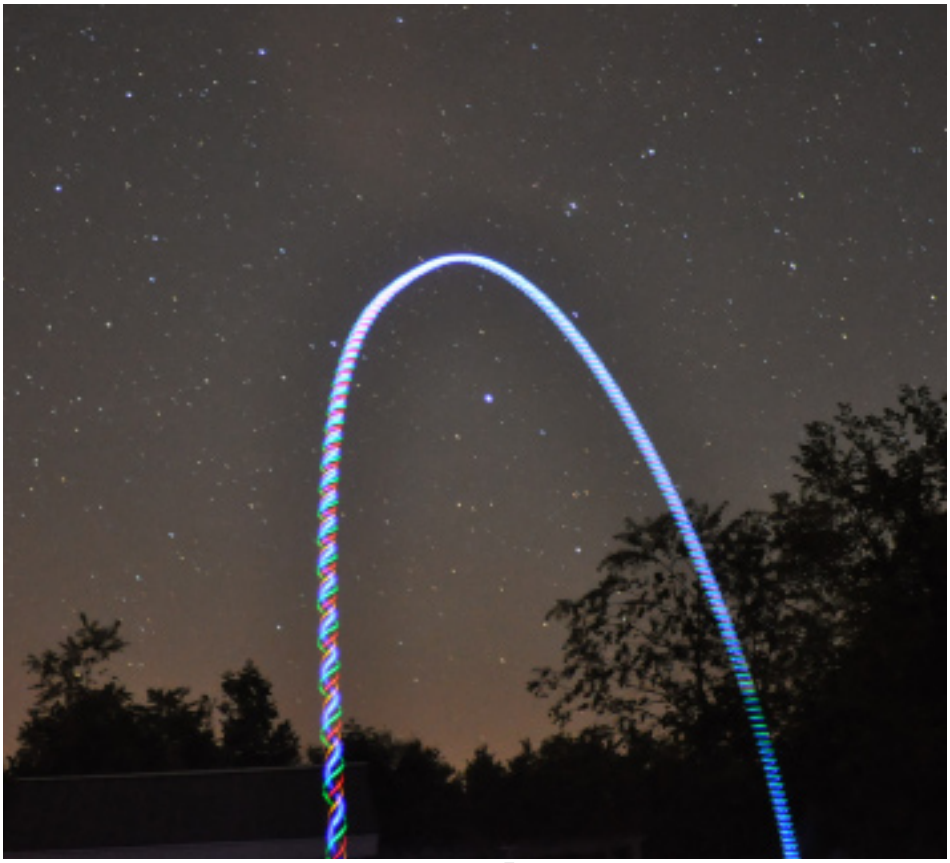


Cover: While driving in New Jersey on return from vacation, I saw this blimp passing over the turnpike. One wonders how many blimps populate the skies over NY City on a given day.

Left: An image of my toy UFO that I used to see if amateur astronomers could detect an object during their observations. In my one test, they did. I will have to see if I can test it another time.

Better late than never

I am sorry for the delay in releasing this issue of SUNlite. I was on vacation and really could not tear myself away from family to devote the time to finish the issue properly. Anytime I have to choose between UFOs (or for that matter - Astronomy) and family, it is family first.

I took some criticism about my article concerning UFO photographs/videos in the last issue. I mentioned that no "true UFOs" had been recorded by all of these systems in place that do record events like bright fireballs. Reality Uncovered member "Buckwild" pointed me towards a video that was shot in Japan by an amateur astronomer some time ago that showed a pair of lights that rapidly moved across the field of view and at some sharp angles. There appears to be something dark between the lights but it is fairly indistinct. One can view the video at the link http://sonotaco.jp/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1723. The owner of the video feels it may be birds or insects. Those at the Bad Astronomy forum (where Buckwild originally discussed this two years ago) felt the lights may have been a reflection off the window the camera was shooting through. The dark object may simply be an artifact of how the object was recorded. One can not definitively say. However, I would not say it actually showed a craft of some kind, which is what I meant in the article when I was discussing "true UFOs".

I noticed in writing to some of my readers that they have the links disabled in their pdf readers. I just want to point out that if you desire to go to the applicable web site (most often in the "Who's blogging" segment), I do provide links so if you want to follow up, enable the links.

Finally, about a year ago, I mentioned that I would test some amateur astronomers to see if they would notice a UFO at an observing session. Using a child's toy (see picture at left) that pushes a spinning wheel with LEDs into the air, I ran a test at a dark sky observing session. The LEDs are not that bright so I was not too concerned about interfering with everyone's night vision. I also made sure that nobody was taking photographs (I was the only astrophotographer present). There were about a half-dozen people observing when I went behind my vehicle and produced my surprise. Almost immediately, I heard, "What the heck is that?" That was immediately followed by, "What are you doing?!!!" It is one small sample but I confirmed my suspicions that people at a dark sky site are not going to be oblivious to everything around them. I may attempt this little experiment a few more times in the future to see if I get a similar response. I just hope I don't get banned from the observing site for these antics.

This issue has quite a collection of articles from various people. I hope my readers will find them interesting and informative. I know that I did. Additionally, I am thankful to Manual Borraz, who pointed out to me a potential explanation for an interesting UFO event from 1957. I appreciate the effort made by all these people.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who's blogging UFOs.....2-3

The Roswell Corner 4

So high up, the earth looked like a what? by Martin S. Kottmeyer.....5-8

In defense of the psychosociological hypothesis – Another reply to Auguste Meessen by Jean-Michel Abrassart.....9-12

An example of mathematical intimidation in Ufology by Nicolas Gauvrit.....12

Project Bluebook Special report no. 14.....13-14

UFO over the Bronx and 1.3 million people miss it!.....15-17

Did the police almost shoot the moon?: An article inspired by an e-mail from Manuel Borraz....18-20

Lost opportunities and stolen valor - a book review by Peter Merlin....21-22

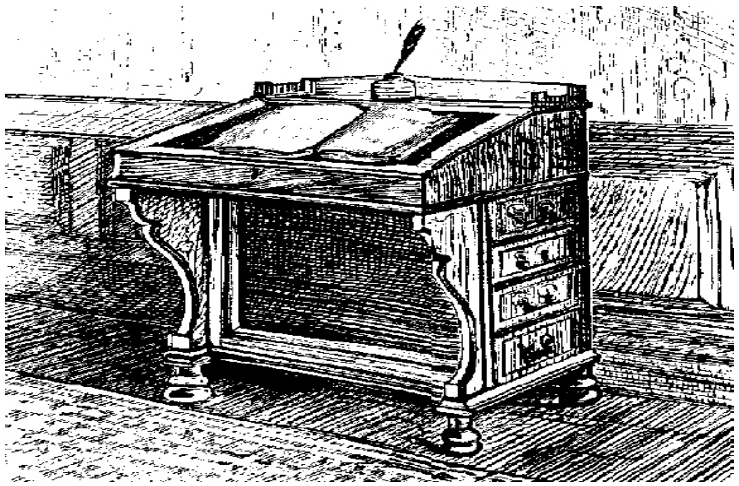
UFOs on the tube.....23

Buy it, borrow it, bin it.....23

Who's blogging UFOs?

Hot topics and varied opinions

Some people never learn. Paul Hill is promoting his lights over lake Erie videos as proof of aliens visiting earth. The last time somebody did this, UFO investigators determined that they were just airplane lights (See SUNlite 2-3). The videos in this clip appear to be the same lights presented last time. They look just like planes on approach to Cleveland's airport.



SETI lost its funding. This is too bad and UFOlogists seem to be rejoicing. How much money has UFOlogy squandered in the past decade chasing useless cases that have proven nothing. At least SETI tried to conduct a search and people can learn from their efforts. UFOlogy does not learn from the past. They just keep repeating the same mistakes.

Robert Sheaffer wrote a wonderful article outlining the work of those at the Above Top Secret forum debunking the UFOs over London videos. Once again, I apply the rule of it looks too good to be true, it probably isn't. This looks like somebody has been playing with CGI again.

Hastings is now promoting the FE Warren AFB missile shutdown on October 23, 2010 as a genuine "UFO and nukes" event. He lists quite a few of the sightings but many of these have absolutely nothing to do with the FE Warren shutdown. The information for all of these sightings he describes is extremely limited but many appear to have potential explanations. As pointed out in the last issue, there were very few unsolicited UFO reports at NUFORC and MUFON, which brought into question, the claims made by Hastings about increased UFO activity in the area. However, Hastings needs these previously unreported events to indicate increased UFO activity inthe area and prop up his rumor about a "blimp-like" UFO that was hovering over the missile silos on October 23-24th. His sources for this UFO are, not surprisingly, anonymous AF personnel. It sounds like scuttlebutt to me and one wonders if somebody might be playing a joke on Hastings. Why didn't any of these airmen or civilians (the silos are not on a base) nearby photograph the UFO since it was visible for two whole days? Hastings also claims to have detailed knowledge about the shutdown. Once again, his sources are the same mysterious personnel. As pointed in last SUNlite, according to official sources, the actual shutdown event occurred at 1:35 AM on the morning of the 23rd. Therefore, none of these "blimp sightings" (which appear to have been made during the day) could have caused the shutdown. Hastings has yet to provide any documentation to support his claims, which is his usual methodology. All he has are rumors, which are not facts.

Irish astronomer Eamonn Ansbro made the news with his claims of recording alien spaceships in orbit around the earth. He also claims that he can predict when they appear. Well, if they are in fixed orbits, it should be no problem to predict them. However, when he attempted to present his "evidence" at a recent SETI conference, some of the scientists present left the room! Ansbro has been promoting this for at least seven years (He appeared at the Irish International UFO conference in 2004) and it sounds like a broken record. If he has the data, why doesn't he publish? Perhaps the scientists at this SETI conference saw it for what it was and there really was nothing to his recordings. Wake me up when he presents the data instead of claims.

James Oberg correctly predicted in an e-mail that there were going to be UFO videos appearing on May 4-5 from Russia. Sure enough, there were plenty of UFO videos/claims made. One individual on the Above Top Secret forum suggested the videos showed the formation of a wormhole for a UFO to travel through! In reality, the videos were of a Russian Meridian Satellite launch from the Plesetsk cosmodrome. This was no surprise since it seems like all these rocket launches (in Russia and the US) still create UFO reports.

My article about the Battle of LA photograph was followed up by two blog entries by Kentaro Mori and Lance Moody. Moody's article is interesting as he describes his interactions with Frank Warren, who stonewalled him when he tried to locate the source of the image he was using. As it turns out, Warren's source used the retouched image and not, what appears to be, the original negative. Warren would post Moody's article with the following comment: *Editor's Note–We thank Lance Moody for allowing us to publish his OP-ED, and of course will follow with a thorough, elucidating rebuttal ASAP.* Warren posted this on the 10th of May but the only thing he would post is a news clipping from 1942 with no comment on the 11th. If this was his "elucidating rebuttal", Warren needs to look at a dictionary for what those words mean. The lack of comment gives far greater weight on what Moody wrote. Of course, SUNlite's readers now know that this image indicated that there was no apparent object in the center of the spotlight beams. They also know that the newspaper accounts of the time were not very accurate about what was in the sky as witnesses and gunners became confused over the AA bursts, smoke, and a few weather balloons that were launched during the event.

No more stupid lights shut down their blog. Very little had been added to their blog over the past year.

Who's blogging UFOs? (Cont'd)

Magonia gave SUNlite a plug, which was appreciated. That plug got passed on to the Anomalist, who usually does not post skeptical links because its readers apparently dislike them. Huzzah!!

Spaceweather.com reported some very interesting solar haloes being visible on May 6th from Belgium. One has to look at these and wonder what our ancestors might have thought and described such events. Some of the arcs/haloes in these images look like the arcs one sees in the 1561 Nuremberg woodcut.

The UFO Iconoclasts posted some interesting ideas about the Socorro UFO story. It is their apparent belief that Zamora saw a prototype lunar lander of some kind. They posted some images of a NEW lunar lander prototype called "Morpheus". Unfortunately, for this explanation, this lander is of recent design and manufacture. I guess the theory is that the Morpheus lander is based on some sort of previous design from the 60s. This theory really isn't new. Major Quintanilla thought it might have been a prototype lander but could find no record of such a test vehicle. Prof. Charles Moore suggested it might have been a helicopter/lunar surveyor test bed over ten years ago when he discovered that this vehicle was scheduled to use the White Sands test range on the date in question. None of these solutions have ever been verified. One can only keep digging for an answer to this one. When discussing this case, I always remember the words of Major Qunitanilla, where he felt the solution lay in Lonnie Zamora's head.

It amazes me that UFOlogists seem to buy into this "fake airplane" business. Now MUFON seems to be endorsing it by publishing a report on their blog where a witness saw a UFO that changed from an "amber ball" to a shape that "mimicked" a passing airplane. We are told there is a video of the event but the witness could not upload it. Maybe the answer to this one is that it was an airplane that looked like an amber ball due to perspective or because it was reflecting the sun.

Anthony Bragalia found time to comment about how some UFOlogists suffer from mental problems. The implication of his blog entry here is that the pressure of investigating UFOs creates unnecessary mental stress on individuals. However, one can say the same for all walks of life. There are far more stressful occupations than those involving a UFO hobby. My guess is that UFOlogists probably suffer from mental health problems at about the same rate as the general population. Maybe somebody should do a statistical study on this.

Paul Kimball seemed to imply that if Peter Gerstein wants to commit suicide, it was okay with him since Gerstein should be able to do as he pleases. I can see his point but at what point does one draw the line? I think the biggest problem with Gerstein's idea is that he made it publicly, which might encourage others to "participate". The last thing UFOlogy needs is another "heaven's gate" episode.

Robert Sheaffer made it easy for me regarding the recent night vision video supposedly showing a "UFO squadron". To me they look like birds. Sheaffer correctly points out how the videographer is mistaken when he assumes it is infrared imagery. As I pointed out in SUNlite 2-2, these individuals operating this equipment should learn how their equipment works and what they are recording. I am trying to decide if they and the blogs/web sites that promote their videos lack knowledge or common sense. It probably is a combination of both.

Robert Hastings finally revealed his audio tape conversation with Walt Figel back in 2010. However, Hastings never posted the e-mail that Figel sent to Hastings and Carlson shortly after this recording was made. In order to plug the leak in that dike, he decided to reveal the audiotape he claimed refuted what Carlson had stated that Figel told him. What was presented on the tape seems to be waffling by Figel. He has stated that he really does not want to get involved and seems to tell people what they want to hear. When pressed by Carlson to make a definitive statement (See the e-mail published in SUNlite 2-3) it becomes clear where he stands on all of this. Hastings' comments at Reality Uncovered seemed to state that one should not trust Figel unless he is describing UFOs over missile silos. Any other information from Figel is to be considered lies or faulty memory. Hastings even made the claim that Dick Evans, who says no missile shutdown occurred at Oscar and was at the alternate command post for the squadron, would not be told that the Oscar flight's missiles were shut down by UFOs because he would not have a need to know. If this is true, why was Robert Salas openly told about the Echo flight shutdown even though he had no need to know? This kind of logic is amazing. When I asked if he even talked to Evans at the Reality Uncovered forum, Hastings did not or refused to answer.

This was followed by a post about his interview with Fredrick Meiwald. I am waiting for Hastings to produce an actual document that indicates the missiles at Oscar did shut down in March of 1967. So far, all we have are "ghost stories" told by two people, who still can't seem to agree on how many missiles were shut down. There is nothing in the unit history that states Oscar ever had a shutdown of missiles, which brings into question these faded memories of a shutdown.

Somebody has produced a list of UFO blogs. I noticed that there were no skeptical UFO blogs. I was also forwarded a link to what the person called "The ultimate guide to alien and UFO resources". There were some good UFO document resources listed but, once again, none of the skeptical blogs/web sites were present. Sigh.....

Stephen Greer/CSETI seems to have legal problems. Greer was holding one of his ET greeting sessions at a wildlife refuge in North Carolina. Apparently, they were not allowed to be there at night waving light sticks and begging for ET to show up without obtaining a permit. As best I can tell, they probably would not have gotten a permit anyway. Does ET ever show up at these things? I am still amazed that people are gullible enough to give Greer their money. Greer and CSETI now has to go to federal court to explain themselves. That might be interesting.

The Roswell Corner

Repeating Roswell myths

Billy Cox recently made a blog entry where he recounted Congressman Schiff's "investigation" into the Roswell story. In that entry, he repeated two of, what I refer to as, "Roswell myths". The first statement Cox repeated as a fact was:

> *...all 1947 records in question from Roswell Army Air Field had been illegally purged. And there was nobody left in the command chain to grill about it. "The GAO believes the outgoing messages were probably destroyed more than 40 years ago," Schiff told Ecker.*

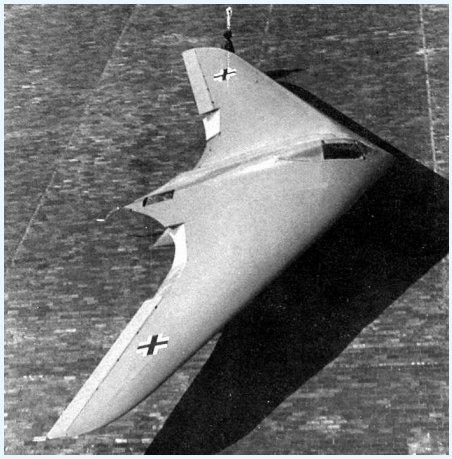
The problem with this statement by Schiff and repeated by Cox is there was absolutely nothing **illegal** about the destruction of the messages. The only problem with the destruction of the messages was there no documentation of the destruction. Robert Todd pointed this out in his CowPflop quarterly of March 8, 1996. There he stated that the Chief Archivist at the National Personnel Records Center, W. G. Siebert, produced regulations that clearly stated that the records were authorized to be destroyed because they were only required to be retained for two years!

The other myth Cox repeated was the same old story about the USAF shifting its story about Roswell:

> *What Schiff did accomplish was to force the USAF to adjust its cover story for the third time, from the original "flying disc" press release, to a case of mistaken identity with a weather balloon, to its current disposition as a classified high-altitude atom-bomb ballon-train sniffer known now as Project Mogul.*

This is not an accurate portrayal of known facts. There is no evidence that anything was a "cover story" and the USAF has not changed its position on the matter. His "changing cover story" of three times apparently starts with the 509th bomb group reporting they found a crashed disc. This was followed by a weather balloon explanation at Fort Worth, which was finally "altered" to Project MOGUL. However, the first statement of a "crashed disc" was not an official AF (or at the time AAF) statement. It was a press release issued by the Roswell Army Air Field and done without authorization from the upper chain of command. The explanation at Fort Worth was based on what was presented to General Ramey and seen in the photographs. What one sees in the images are remnants of weather balloon(s) and radar reflector(s). The USAF report, in 1994, still states that the debris in the photographs was from weather balloon(s) and radar reflector(s). All they did was change the source of those balloon(s) and reflector(s). In 1947, it was thought they came from a single balloon and reflector. In 1994, it was determined these materials probably came from a balloon flight launched by the NYU team at Alamogordo in early June as part of Project MOGUL. This involved many weather balloons and multiple reflectors of the same type seen in the Fort Worth photographs. They produced such a large quantity of materials at the Foster Ranch that it can explain why some felt that the debris could not have been produced by a weather balloon.

Roswell proponents repeat these "myths" over and over again to the masses hoping their words will be repeated in turn. It is desired that such a repetition will make it appear that this is a fact when it really is not.



A crashed Horton jet??

File this one under the wild and unverifiable Roswell stories category. Annie Jacobsen wrote a book about Area 51, where she described a story told to her by an unidentified source that stated the source of the Roswell incident was Russian. According to the source, the Russians built a Horton jet and then flew it to the US with a bunch of young pilots that looked like aliens. Jacobsen apparently found this source highly reliable but really provided no information to back up the story told by the witness. She obviously has not learned from Roswell research in the past.

I recall people saying Frank Kaufmann (among a host of others) was highly reliable as well. One should verify such stories before proclaiming them to be reliable. There is no evidence the Russians ever built a Horton Jet and that such a craft had the range to fly from the Soviet Union to New Mexico (a distance of over 3,000 miles). If they did build such a craft in 1947 with such an extensive range, why were they busy reverse engineering the B-29? The story just begged to be debunked and both skeptics/crashed spaceship proponents peppered the web with arguments why this was just completely out of touch

When ABC interviewed the source, they found somebody who seemed to be confused and contradicted the story Jacobsen described. They confronted her with this information and Jacobsen basically stated that is not what the witness told her. Like many of the Roswell stories and authors, the story was not verified and, when checked, was found to be flawed. For all the Roswell proponents who went about debunking this story, maybe they need to look at their own little house of cards and see what real evidence they have that supports their cherished witness testimonies.

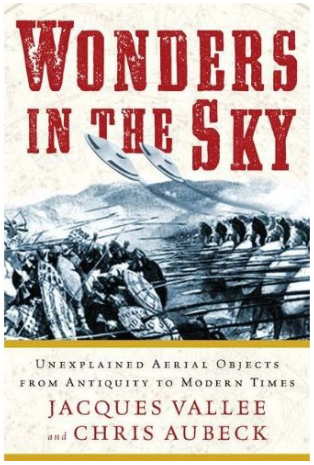
There were a myriad of book reviews on various UFO skeptic and proponent blogs complaining about the book. You know you crossed the line, when you have both sides criticizing your research. Peter Merlin provides a good review in this issue and if you are interested, Dwayne Day proposed a possible explanation as to how the story might have originated. It seems that this tall tale is just another one of those "rumors" that somebody heard from somebody else, who knew a person, who was a very credible friend that knew somebody who should have known.

Is the UFO phenomenon a modern new phenomenon, something spawned by Hiroshima, or is it, like prostitution, among the oldest obsessions? There is no true consensus about this and that can be a frustrating matter. Theoretical implications follow upon which answer you choose. Some notions like gathering intel for The Landing or creating hybrids for a post-apocalyptic environment don't seem very likely if UFOs have been at work for centuries. On the other hand, the odds are remote that multiple races of aliens have just happened to arrive when humanity itself has began to get serious about exploring other worlds.

The case for UFOs being ancient rather than modern has been riddled with problems. Erich von Daniken's ancient astronaut writings were so heavily debunked they are regarded as landmarks in the excesses of pseudoscience. Ezekiel and biblical UFOs have some popular acceptance, but there is a double edge here for critical minds – isn't this just believers looking for excuses to believe in miracles and treat the Bible as history rather than myth and legend?

Chris Aubeck and Jacques Vallee's Wonders in the Sky: Unexplained Aerial Objects from Antiquity to Modern Times and their Impact on Human Culture, History, and Beliefs (Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2010) is a new effort to raise the status of ancient UFOs and settle the issue firmly. Whether it will be as successful in gaining respect for the subject as they hope, I have some doubts about. For one thing, they have a somewhat circumscribed and circumspect approach. They prefer not to argue whether the UFO phenomenon is extraterrestrial, but rather that there is some broad-ranging anomaly that has a core of robust constant characteristics that are identical to the modern UFO phenomenon. When things look inconstant they blame the bedeviling details on the cultural environments and a possible strategic camouflage to blend in. But what precisely is the nature of the anomaly? Do they think it is something that is inherently and permanently beyond human understanding?

It is good advice to be careful about first impressions in life. Wonders in the Sky has the misfortune of introducing its project with a claim some friend should have advised the authors to think twice about before making. The book quotes somebody fronting for a discipline – doubtless esoteric – called ethnosemiotics. He precedes them in their project by proclaiming that UFOs, abductions by beings beyond our Earth, and beliefs about other worlds can be found in the earliest writings that have survived decay. They span every culture. Typical of these is the example of a legend of a king named Etana who ruled the city of Kish thousands of years ago. Aubeck and Vallee write of it the following:



(He) makes an ascent to the sky in order to bring down a plant that cures childlessness – that reference to the theme of reproduction again. "Along with Etana we move from heaven to heaven and we see the land underneath becoming smaller and smaller, and the wide sea like a tub," a classic abductee statement.

I've read a lot of abduction literature in my time and I think my reaction to this can be termed fully informed and properly measured. I thought: A tub?

I shouldn't even have to say it, but no modern abductee has used the word tub to describe the sea when looking down from a saucer leaving Earth. It would be weird if any had for everyone has known for centuries that the world is spherical. The description of the sea as a tub is an image you should expect in ancient times when the earth was thought to be flat. It was fairly common in the ancient world to think of the Earth as bowl-shaped. The Mesopotamian region, in particular, held such beliefs inspired by large valleys and high mountains. In a nearby flatter desert landscape, one finds Earth described as God's footstool. For UFOlogists wedded to defending the reality of abduction experiences, Etana's story should be avoided like a rabid pelican. It lays abductees open to the charge of welcoming flat-earthers to their ranks and insists abduction imagery tracks with cultural mindscapes.

After my amusement turned to puzzle-

ment, it occurred to me that the authors had perhaps written carelessly and what they intended to praise as classic was the part of the line describing the land becoming smaller and smaller. Yet even in this distinction, the description is false. Abductions commonly are about humans being subjected to medical procedures and sexual indignities and aliens have no inherent logical reason to take people off-planet to do such things. Scenes of abductees experiencing space travel are in the minority and seeing the earth shrink into the distance seems quite hard to find even with the help of Bullard's definitive study of all abduction cases up to 1985. The most relevant scenes I could find are these:

- Janet X (February 1955) sees the Earth on a screen, a television device showing a picture of the earth. Possibly real-time imagery, but does the representational character disqualify it?

- In the 1957 Guimares' abduction the experiencer only sees earth's atmospheric layers as the ship rises and says nothing of seeing the earth or its shape.

- Vincent L. (1975) had flashbacks of lying on an exam table, looking out a round window and *"seeing what appears to be earth below."* No indication is present of motion.

- Toni M. (1975) said she saw a round window that first looked black, then as if a shade were being drawn up she first saw clouds, then *"a view of Earth."* The shape of the earth is not given and no emotional reaction is reported.

- Darren Sunderland (Jan 1980) sees the lights of the city *"being replaced by a scene of planet Earth; blue and beautiful. Then it, too, vanished and they raced past points of light, some that were stars and others more solid looking like planets."* (Jenny Randles, Alien Contact, p. 101)

- Carl Higdon (1974) answers a question about whether he saw the Earth down below him with *"Yes."* A later question by Leo Sprinkle asks him about if he had a feeling of seeing the globe... the Earth? He answers, *"Yes, uh huh."* Further along in the investigation he elaborates that he saw the earth through the transparent floor and it looked *"the size of a basketball."* One of Sprinkle's colleagues expressed a concern Higdon was merely projecting: *"Most people have seen photos of the earth taken from space and this would not be unusual."* (Richard Haines, UFOs and the Behavioral Scientist)

- Antônio Carlos Ferreira (1979) enters a compartment and finds *"a small round window with a red pane and, looking out through it, he was astonished to perceive what was evidently the Earth, looking quite small so far away".*

- Virginia Horton sees Earth only from enough height to see North America and the Great Lakes. Her account of the scene is longer than the others, yet it seems curiously lacking in emotional depth. Strangely, you can quote her as denying it looked like a globe, but blaming that on the presence of clouds. (Budd Hopkins, Missing Time)

Given this was taken from a population of 270 cases this is rather slim pickings. If one were in a generous mood, one might judge Sunderland, Higdon, and Ferreira's accounts as acceptable as distant parallels to Etana's seeing a receding Earth – call it 1%.

Beyond the rarity, such scenes disappoint in their brevity and lack of emotional reaction. Anyone who followed the space program know that astronauts have sometimes expressed almost mystical transcendent sentiments on seeing the Earth from space. James Irwin, of Apollo 15, said, *"I felt the power of God as I'd never felt before."* Harrison Schmidt, of Apollo 17, wrote expansively of the glorious beauty he perceived Earth held, and how it forced one to make spiritual decisions. Alfred Worden, of Apollo 15, actually wrote a book of poetry to express how spaceflight changed his entire view of reality on earth and made him feel rejuvenated. Edgar Mitchell, of Apollo 14, in particular emphasized how seeing the Earth was so breathtaking and powerful that it caused him to re-examine his entire philosophy. He asserts, *"No man that I know of has gone into space... and not been affected in some way very similar."* There may some slight exaggeration in this, and Charles Conrad, of Apollo 12, insists each astronaut reacted in a distinctive manner. While some react spiritually; others had feelings more like pride and being part of an epic technological achievement. (Rosen 1979)

Science fiction writers and filmmakers had some inkling that such emotions would be a natural expectation. George Griffith's Stories of Other Worlds (1900) has early in it a scene where a traveler perceives the Earth as *"infinitely more magnificent"* than their destination, the 'wonderful' Moon. Griffith has the person *"gazing for nearly an hour at this marvelous vision of the home-world which she had left so far behind before she could tear herself away."* The Buck Rogers comic strip has Wilma in awe at seeing Earth from in space in a strip dated 1930. Early in Olaf Stapledon's Star-Maker (1937) a narrator realizes he is starting an interstellar journey and the description of the orb of the Earth at first has the ponderous detail of a geography lesson. But then he turns lyrical:

> *The spectacle before me was strangely moving. Personal anxiety was blotted out by wonder and admiration; for the sheer beauty of our planet surprised me. It was a huge pearl, set in spangled ebony. It was nacrous, it was opal. No, it was far more lovely than any jewel. Its patterned colouring were more subtle, more ethereal. It displayed the delicacy and brilliance, the intricacy and harmony of a live thing. Strange that in my remoteness I seemed to feel, as never before, the vital presence of Earth as of a creature alive but tranced and obscurely yearning to wake.*

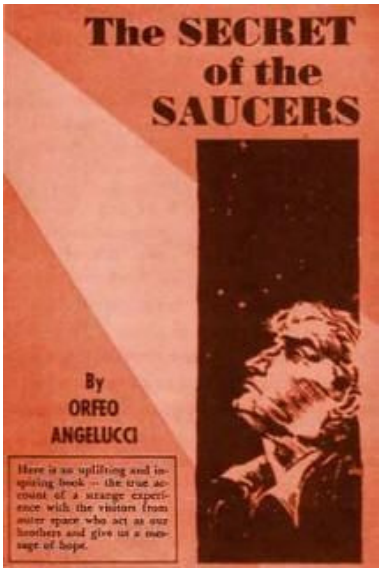
Apart from the pantheistic excess of the

last half line, Stapledon's vision captures sentiments exactly like astronauts expressed several decades later.

In the silent film era space epic Woman in the Moon (1929), explorers gaze on the distant Earth with the sun starting to emerge behind it and the music turns spiritual with a religious chorale in accompaniment. In This Island Earth, Faith Domergue, playing a female atomic scientist, sees the Earth being left behind and exclaims "Earth!" with a suitable sense of being awestruck.

It is tempting to regard the bland accounts of space imagery in abductions as reflective of the post-Apollo ennui towards space travel. There was something of a cultural backlash against the spending of money on what were essentially shows of national pride instead of more practical matters like feeding the poor. Yet, it could be explained well enough by the logic of the situation. Abduction experiences are essentially horror stories and not, generally speaking, an occasion for meditative thoughts.

By contrast, the contactees of the 50s were friends of, brothers to, the aliens and taking humans on trips to other planets were part of their modus operandi. Scenes of contactees seeing the earth from space would be expected and are, in fact, easy to find.



Orfeo Angelucci gave what I consider the finest account in Secret of the Saucers (1955):

The lights inside darkened. Then either the entire craft or the seat turned slightly more to left and the strange window widened about three more feet. I saw a huge globe surrounded by a shimmering rainbow. I trembled as I realized I was actually looking upon a planet from somewhere out in space. The planet itself was of a deep, twilight-blue intensity and the iridescent rainbow surrounding it made it appear like a dream-vision. I couldn't see it all, for a portion at the bottom of the sphere was cut off by the floor line.

Now I heard a voice that I remembered so well. "Orfeo, you are looking upon Earth – your home! From here, over a thousand miles away in space, it appears as the most beautiful planet in the heavens and a haven of peace and tranquility. But you and Earthly brothers know the true conditions there... My heart was so full of emotion that tears were the only possible expression."

The rainbow looks new Age-y today and taints it to scientific minds, but the emotions are appropriately transcendent.

Though Cecil Michaels is little remembered these days, he was among the first contactees in print with Round Trip to Hell in a Flying Saucer (1955) It's not easy to find these days, but in Signs & Wonders (1977), an expanded account, he describes a trip to a red planet that has a few lines describing the receding earth

The curvature of the earth started to show up now, and the earth became rounder-looking. Soon it was the form of huge ball with a big white cap on either side of it. As the minutes rolled by, the earth became smaller and smaller until it appeared no larger than a basketball ..

Later, I looked back to see what had become of that big earth that I had left only minutes ago. It was shrinking rapidly back there in the haze and gathering blackness of space.

George Adamski directly and correctly described earth as *"a large ball of light beneath us"* in his trip to the moon. In describing his interplanetary flight, Howard Menger offered a perfunctory line testifying he saw earth *"fast diminishing in size"* I accept these two are merely providing logical geometry, not narrative wonder.

T. Lobsang Rampa's Trip to Venus (1966) has a notable couple of paragraphs describing the journey away from earth, how the curvature of Earth became apparent, the colors of an aurora they pass through, and Earth becoming "*the size of a small round fruit, gleaming with a blue-grey light.*" The point I am edging up to is that the line quoted from Etana's myth is more correctly described as being a classic contactee statement. And this is a point one can reinforce by a fuller consideration of the original story.

Etana was a king of the Sumerian city of Kish, and the fable existed in several versions, probably all the surviving ones were originally part of the library of the Assyrian monarch Ashurbanipal (668-635 B.C.) Joseph Campbell tells one version in writings on myth. The king asks the gods to give him the means to have a child. They direct him to an eagle imprisoned in a pit who knows where there is a plant that will enable this desire to be fulfilled. The bird was in the pit as punishment for breaking an oath once. For his freedom, the bird swore to be servant to any mortal sent to him by Shamash, his god. Etana releases the bird from the pit and they fly to acquire the plant. The bird climbs higher and higher to the heavens. Periodically the eagle asks the king to look below to see how far up they have gone. The journey spans hours and the king reports how he sees the landscape receding with land and sea shrinking and shrinking in apparent size.

They reach the heaven's gates of Anu, Bel, and Ea, but must continue to a still higher heaven. They climb towards the heaven of Ishtar (our Venus) and below them the king now perceives, "The land is a mere clod and the broad salt sea a wicker basket." Two hours later, Etana could not even see the land or sea and he cries to the eagle to climb no farther. With that command they start to fall back. It takes hours and when they crash, both shatter.

The widow mourns and the king's ghost is thereafter invoked in times of need.

One moral of the tale is supposed to be the folly of seeking the immortality of gods. It is perhaps worth noticing that this is somewhat similar to the myth of the Tower of Babylon in the Bible. Man was punished to speak multiple languishes for the arrogance of trying to build a tower that could reach the gods.

The destination of Ishtar/Venus is an interesting detail of the Etana myth for it lines up parallel to contactee mythology. Venus was the most common stated home of Space Brothers and contactees visited it on multiple occasions. While they described it in terms more usual to utopian literature, the occasional detail echoed the heaven of Christian mythology and, less distinctively, oriental religion's heavens. The choice of Venus, for Etana, is guided by the fact that Ishtar was the goddess of fertility in his times. That was less true in the case of the contactees, but the Space Brothers did possess beauty and seemingly perpetual youth in conformity to Greco-Roman myth.

A perhaps deeper parallel concerns the moral. Etana's tale was a warning against the arrogance of seeking to be as gods. Contactees were similarly worried about the power of the atom and the doubted spirituality of scientists who brought humans the means of mass death. Oppenheimer's echo of being as Krishna, *"the shatterer of worlds,"* may not have been intended as pride, but the sense this was approaching the deeds of gods seemed a common judgment.

I trust skeptics at this point may feel I'm stretching things a bit to get this parallel. True, but when Aubeck & Vallee look at Etana's quest for a cure for childlessness as a valid parallel to the Breeding program because they share a concern with reproduction, they had equally been engaged in something of a taffy pull With such myth aerobics, the detail that, like UFOs, Etana crashed to Earth presumably also means we should predict soon hearing Viagra came from Roswell.

I conclude the Etana myth matches contactee mythology better than abductee mythology. The authors either blindly didn't realize this, or chose to ignore it. Why? Nobody cares about contactees these days for we know their stories were unreal. There is no life on Venus. Only mythologists care if one unreality resembles another unreality. As budding ethno-semioticians, they needed to propose that Etana and abductees somehow mutually bolster each other's reality robustness. This is in service to *"living in a state of advanced other-world pluralism."* Your reality, my reality, all realities are equal.

By corollary, the study of ancient UFOs is an exercise of wise tolerance and worthy of your time and deference. But what of the un-realities? Aren't they less equal? I'm pretty sure scientists are going to say unrealities are pragmatically worthless. Believing Venus is inhabited and alien abductions are a material menace in some alternate reality sense is not tolerance . It is just foolish and asking for trouble. Simply iterating parallels between alleged realities, to scientists, looks pointless if you can also iterate parallels to unrealities. What is even more discouraging, our budding ethnosemioticians don't explain what causes the parallels. What's the point of gathering and presenting observations if it is not for or against some theory?

In the matter of contactee/Etana parallels, the answer probably lies in literary theory. Etana and modern contactees share scenes of a receding earth for probably the same narrative reason. They both aspire to create a sense of wonder by estrangement. They take listeners to a distance where one can imagine the world differently. The Etana story does this quite deliberately in the original version with scenes that build tension by successive changes in the changes in the world. The climax is the final scene where the king realized the earth is no longer visible and so panics. Cecil Michael and T. Lobsang Rampa take similar strategies of building tension by successive scenes of earth getting smaller. Orfeo Angelucci though achieves estrangement via describing transcendence and seeing earth as encircled by a rainbow. The achieving of such wonder is sometimes regarded as the defining characteristic of modern science fiction.

Aubeck & Vallee's book, similarly, qualifies in its manifold estrangement. It aspires to be more, but this opening blunder makes me wonder.

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Joseph Campbell incidentally refers to the mighty Solar Eagle as "the vehicle of the world's first astronaut." (p. 132)

On real-life astronaut reactions to seeing Earth from space:

Stanley Rosen, "Space Consciousness: The Astronauts' Testimony" Michigan Quarterly Review Spring 1979. The same issue's "Re_entry: Earth Images in Post-Apollo Culture" by Daniel Noel touches on the cultural emotional spiritual reaction to space images of Earth.

In the Shadow of the Moon (2007), Ron Howard's documentary about the Apollo program, gathers together several first-person accounts of astronauts viewing the Earth that illustrates Rosen's point. The DVD has additional accounts in its extras.

Aubeck/Vallee were inspired to write on Etana by this book:

Couliano, Out of this World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein Boston: Shambhala, 1991.

In defense of the psycho-sociological hypothesis – Another reply to Auguste Meessen

by Jean-Michel Abrassart

If evil be spoken of you and it be true, correct yourself, if it be a lie, laugh at it. (Epictetus)

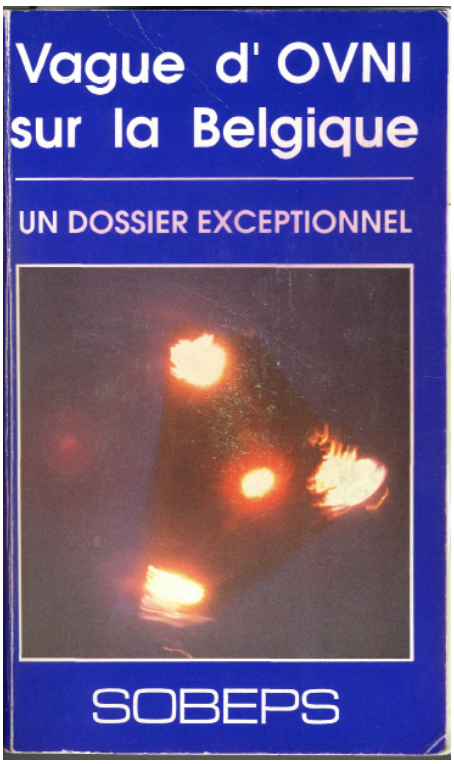
In his 2011 article, The Belgian Wave and the photos of Ramillies , Auguste Meessen tries to answer some of the recent critics made by several skeptics (namely Roger Paquay, Tim Printy and myself) concerning the work done by the pro-extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) group SOBEPS (now COBEPS) on the Belgian UFO wave. I have read the previous replies made by my skeptical colleagues in the last issue of SUNlite. Several very important points have already been made by them. I will try not to repeat them here. I'd like to focus instead on some of the logical fallacies and bad reasoning used by the physicist to try to convince people that the psychosociological hypothesis (PSH) cannot explain the Belgian UFO wave.

During his long UFOlogical carrier, this physicist has always confused his own speculations with "facts" and his opinions with "the truth". His abstract starts in a very telling way, when he writes, "We restore the truth". Everybody should be wary about a scientist claiming to "restore the truth" instead of simply replying to his contradictors. That kind of vocabulary is more typical of apologetic religious discourses than scientific ones. Auguste Meessen seems to be like Pope John Paul II, and wants to show us – the infidels – the "Splendor of Truth".

Since the very beginning of his interests in the UFO subject, Auguste Meessen showed a naïve conception of human psychology. From a scientific standpoint, his influence over the years on the SOBEPS group was mostly negative, pushing them more and more toward the pseudo-scientific side of the fence. In this article, Auguste Meessen claims again that:

> *The psychosocial hypothesis can thus not account for the Belgian wave and all UFO observations do not result from errors or illusions!*

The Belgian physicist is of course entitled to have his own opinion on the matter, but he seems to think that if he claims something loudly enough it will make it true. This is wishful thinking: there will



always be critical thinkers who won't be convinced by his weak argumentation. Yelling insults at them won't change that fact, on the contrary. Sometimes, like during the recent COBEPS conference (14 mai 2011 at Perwez, Belgium), Auguste Meessen tries to claim that he's not a proponent of the ETH. This is simply not true. In his paper Où en sommes-nous en ufologie ? he wrote that he believes that there was a flying-saucer crash at Roswell, that UFOlogists should reconsider (of course in a more positive light) Ray Santilli's autopsy movie and that there is a US government conspiracy to hide the truth. In the same article, he also speculates about Grey's telepathic abilities or the fact that Men in Black, the chupacabra and contactees (like George Adamski or Billy Meier) are – according to him - part of a sociological experiment conducted by aliens. Thus when Auguste Meessen tries to argue that he's not an ETH-proponent, I must confess that I'm really unconvinced.

It is obvious to anybody familiar with the scientific method that if SOBEPS really had proven that the Belgian UFO wave could only be explained by extraterrestrial spacecraft, Auguste Meessen & Co. would have made the cover of Nature a long time ago and would have probably won a Nobel Prize soon after that. We should also point out that all his publications did not appear in peer-reviewed science journals – as they should be in order to take part of the scientific process – but either in Inforespace (SOBEPS newsletter) or more recently on his own web site. To my knowledge, Auguste Meessen's only peer-reviewed publication close to the subject of the Belgian UFO wave was "Le phénomène OVNI et le Problème des Méthodologies" , an article about the methodology of UFO research published in the Revue Française de Parapsychologie, a very confidential parapsychological French publication (edited by a very controversial parapsychologist named Yves Lignon), and even there it was only has a rebuttal to an earlier publication by Marc Hallet criticizing his work! Of course, some would probably not hesitate to call upon some kind of conspiracy theory to rationalize that fact instead of considering that simply SOBEPS work failed to convince the scientific community. All that to say that the condescending tone of Meessen's publications is not matched at all by his scientific track record on the subject or, for that matter, by the evidences he can show to support his views.

He's grossly misrepresenting, as usual, the skeptical position. Let's take only one example of this:

> *The attitude of so-called "skeptics", claiming that UFOs cannot exist, simply obstructs clarification, but purely speculative statements are also inadequate.*

To put it bluntly, I do not know of any skeptic who claims that UFOs cannot exist. Those are only the skeptics that exist in Auguste Meessen's imagination. To the contrary, we say that you know you are a skeptic when you understand what the U of UFO stands for: UFOs are just "objects" (actually many stimuli can – and do – generate a UFO observation, and sometimes stimuli are not even necessary) that subjects see and fail to identify. Since UFO testimonies exist, UFOs obviously do exist. There is an unhealthy slip of language in the physicist's sen-

tence between UFOs and extraterrestrial spacecraft (these words seem to be used in a synonymous fashion by him, which is also very telling), but I also don't know any skeptic who claims that extraterrestrial spacecraft cannot exist. What skeptics really say is that there is no proof of extraterrestrial spacecraft visiting the Earth. There are some discussions about the a priori plausibility of the ETH, involving the Fermi paradox and other things like that, but skeptics are skeptics a posteriori, after looking at the UFO literature and assessing the presence or absence of proof.

In his article, Auguste Meessen uses the rhetorical strategy know as the reversal of the burden of proof. He states:

> *He (Jean-Michel Abrassart) simply postulates that all UFO observations have to result from perceptual errors or imagination, facilitated by rumor propagation. He cannot and could never prove that this is true.*

An emeritus professor in physics should know that it is not to skeptics to prove a negative. It is to claimants to prove their claims. In the UFOlogical context, it is Auguste Meessen who makes extraordinary claims, not me: he is thus the one who has the burden of proof, not skeptics. And as the late Carl Sagan elegantly put it: *"Extraordinary claims need extraordinary proof"*. Needless to say, we haven't seen anything in his writing (or in any other SOBEPS team writings) that proves the ETH. To prove it, you would need either (a) a sample of biological material that is beyond doubt from extraterrestrial origin and/or (b) a sample of technological material that is beyond doubt from extraterrestrial origin. Auguste Meessen has presented none of those to the scientific community. He mainly has witness testimonies, AKA anecdotes. But, as skeptics often say, the plural of anecdotes is not data.

Let's examine now the most insulting part of the article, when he's calling into question my ethic as a psychologist. Contrary to what Auguste Meessen claims, I simply never said that:

> *Jean-Michel Abrassart did that for the beginning of the Belgian wave, since he claimed that the two gendarmes – who attentively observed an unconventional flying object during more than two hours – are not trustworthy. He stated even that they have "fantasy-prone personalities" and called them "schizotypical". A psychologist who qualifies persons in such a way, without any thorough examination and without even having talked with them, violates all professional ethics.*

I actually wrote:

> *However, there is nothing to suggest that, because a person is a policeman, this disqualifies him from having a fantasy-prone personality or even from being schizotypical. Now, the SOBEPS never submitted them, or any other witness to the Belgian Wave, to any kind of psychological testing. After all, it's not worth looking into the psychology of witnesses when the only thing you're after is proof in favor of the extraterrestrial hypothesis!*

I was thus referring to the current state of scientific literature. One of my main points in my previous article (that August Meessen simply didn't address) was that we don't know anything about the psychology of Von Montigny and Nichols (or any other witness of the Belgian UFO wave for that matter), because SOBEPS did such a bad job investigating the wave. Because of their prior belief in the ETH, they didn't think that it was important to document the psychology of witnesses. Thus, we miss today a lot of very important information to really understand why and how this wave happened. Auguste Meessen doesn't have anything (except his own opinion) to back up his claim that because the witnesses are two policemen, then we should take them more seriously than the usual witness, so he's only making an ad hominem attack against me, hoping that it will convince his readers that he has good arguments in this debate. We shouldn't be fooled by such lazy thinking.

Auguste Meessen also likes to use mathematics and diagrams to impress his readers. This is a rhetorical strategy that skeptics call "math intimidation". This tactic can only work on the layman who doesn't know much about the scientific method and/or the UFO phenomena. I asked Nicolas Gauvrit, a mathematician, to look at his new argument against the psychosocial contagion. You'll find his analysis on page 12. Mathematics based on bad reasoning doesn't prove anything.

During the recent COBEPS conference, Meessen stated that skeptics believe that the Belgian UFO wave was a rumor effect. If you read my paper about the beginning of the wave, you know that I never spoke of a rumor. On the contrary, I talked about a psychosocial contagion, as defined by the late Philip J. Klass. This is just a straw man argument. Meessen tries to refute the SPH by posing how he thinks a sociological contagion should work (as a rumor effect), then he shows mathematically that the Belgian UFO wave didn't work that way (even if nobody claimed that), before finally concluding (what he already believed in the first place anyway) that he has falsified the SPH. Of course, everything relies on how he, as a physicist and ETH-proponent, thinks that a sociological contagion should work. If a sociological contagion can happen in some other fashion than the way he thinks, then he's rejecting the SPH on baseless ground. An important point you should note is that he doesn't refer to any research at all in psychology (or any other human sciences) about other sociological contagions or mass hysteria: he seems to think that he doesn't need to read the scientific literature on the subject to know

how it should work. The only paper he refers to is the one published by another SOBEPS team member, Michel Bougard (a chemist and ETH-proponent), in Vague d'ovnis sur la Belgique I (VOB I): "Media et phénomène OVNI. Approche statistique sur un éventuel effet de rumeur". We can thus say confidently that the mathematical model applied by August Meessen in his article has never been applied successfully to any other sociological contagion, to show that it describes it properly. His whole attitude shows not only his lack of expertise in psychology, the fact that he doesn't shy away to make bold claims in fields in which he has no qualification whatsoever, but also his deep disdain of human sciences. Of course, his model is fairly simplistic, when social phenomena are known to be messy and complex. It is obvious that objective phenomena – like for example what kind of mundane stimuli can been seen in the sky at what time – will influence the sociological contagion. A mass hysteria doesn't happen in a vacuum, where one testimony simply generate other testimonies in a straightforward causal way. The Belgian UFO wave wasn't a rumor effect. There are mediating variables, like for example the quantity and quality of media coverage, that will fluctuate on top of the objective amount of observations at any time according to journalists interest in the subject, the number of observations that were not collected by SOBEPS, the mundane activity in the sky at any given time, the weather that will influence if something can be seen or not, and so on. On the other hand, other aspects of the wave, like the geographical localization of it clearly points to a sociological contagion – but the Belgian physicist only considers aspects that conform to his prior belief.

Auguste Meessen still doesn't understand the importance of the time of the reporting to SOBEPS versus the time of the alleged observation. He writes:

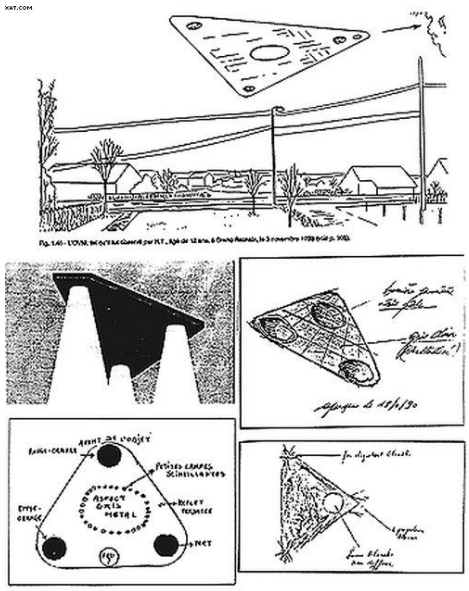
> *Moreover, we notice in figure 1 that UFO observations occurred already before the official start of the Belgian wave on November 29, 1989, but these observations remained unreported until later on. The reason is that these witnesses could not make sense of what they saw!*

One of my main point in my previous article is that observations that have been collected after the media started talking about the wave cannot be considered independent because they have been (and I think heavily) influenced by the media before the time of the reporting. The physicist states that these witnesses simply could not make sense of what they saw. It shows that he still underestimate the power of suggestions on human testimonies. When those witnesses saw the news in the media, it didn't just help them understand what they saw, it reshaped their memories of what they saw and their subsequent testimonies. The quote above supports my position much more than the one of the physicist, even if he completely fails to see it.

One of the favorite arguments of proponents is the alleged consistency of the testimonies. He writes:

> *This is confirmed by its later evolution and by the fact that so many witnesses consistently reported a new type of UFOs.*

Auguste Meessen tries here to convince us that the fact that the Belgian UFO wave displayed triangle-shaped UFOs instead of the classical flying saucer is an argument in favor of the extraterrestrial origin. It's a neat rhetorical trick, when you think that in fact it fits a lot better with the PSH! First, does he really think that extraterrestrials have changed design for the wave? Before they liked saucer-shaped craft, but in 1989 there was a new fashion in alien spaceship design? Or is it a new species, the Grey enjoying the saucer shape but the newcomers preferring the triangular one? And let's not forget that Kenneth Arnold saw objects in a boomerang shape, but the flying saucer took off in testimonies only after a mistake made by a journalist (see the article "The Truth Is, They Never Were 'Saucers'" by Robert Sheaffer for more on this). Anyone who looks objectively at the UFO phenomena knows that the consistency argument doesn't hold any water. For example, "The Field Guide to UFOs" has eight categories of shape reported in UFO testimonies: lights, spheres, discs, ellipses, cylinders, rectangles, triangles and shape shifters. The change at the beginning of the Belgian UFO wave happened following the pattern we all have seen in science-fiction. And of course, there have been triangular-shaped UFOs in science-fiction a long



time before the beginning of the Belgian UFO wave. Secondly, triangles are easier to generate by misperception, because any tree points in the sky who are not in line look by definition like a triangle. Witnesses tend to fill in the gaps and usually see a black shape between the dots. The triangular shape is much better suited than the saucer one for a psychological contagion. Thirdly, that shape was reported a lot by witnesses because it was the shape they could see in the media all the time. Fourthly, the alleged "consistency" of the testimonies Auguste Meessen is talking about also comes from the way SOBEPS investigated cases. I'm quoting here Jacques Scornaux, addressing this very point in an interview he gave to me for the podcast "Scepticisme scientifique : Le balado de la Science et de la Raison" (my translation):

> *Since they [author's note: the SOBEPS team] received thousands of phone calls, they had to select some of them. They couldn't investigate every single case. Thus some cases were removed on the only basis of what the witness said on the phone. When the witness described a simple ball of light in the sky, they didn't do any inquiry because of the lack of time. On the other hand, if the witness talked about a triangle on the phone, then someone would investigate. That's how triangular cases became – through a very simple process – the majority. Again, I believe they did that innocently. They didn't realize that the proportion of triangles was artificially augmented that way, by the way messages left on the answering*

machine were selected. (…) And thus the proportions of different kinds of observations (…) were altered unconsciously by the action of the SOBEPS.

To conclude, I will simply say that, even if it's highly unlikely that he would listen to me, I would strongly advise Auguste Meessen to turn down the condescending tone and to stop making claims that he can't back up. He should especially stop claiming that he has proven beyond any reasonable doubts that the psychosocial hypothesis can't explain the Belgian UFO wave, because it is clearly not the case.

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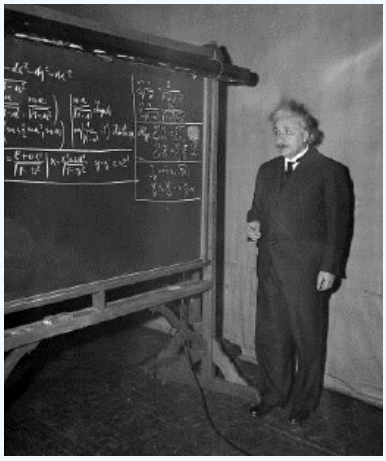
An example of mathematical intimidation in UFOlogy

By Nicolas Gauvrit



The UFOlogist and anti-skeptics August Meessen published recently on the Internet an article about the Belgian UFO wave. His goal in it was to refute arguments from skeptics, according to whom many UFO testimonies during that wave can be explained very well within the sociopsychological hypothesis theoretical framework: misinterpretations associated to sociological and media effects can lead to that phenomenon. According to skeptics – advocating this approach – misinterpretations (i.e. to take a balloon for a flying saucer or to think that a secret military aircraft is an alien spaceship), when they generate enough media coverage, lead to more mistakes of the same type and also to testimonies from people that thought first that they had seen something mundane but to whom it is suggested that the extraterrestrial hypothesis is plausible.

Amongst the different arguments put forward by Meessen, we can find, at the bottom of page 4, the unsupported claim that the sociopsychological hypothesis need the evolution of the number of testimonies to follow a logistic distribution, aka a solution to the differential equation $dN/dt = aN(1-bN)$, where N is the number of testimonies, and a and b parameters.

This claim by Meessen seems weird, or at least based on very shaky ground.

1. What Meessen proposes is to use in order to represent the number of testimonies a Verhulst model. But this model has not been design to model the spread of beliefs but the evolution of populations in a given area. The hypothesis that supports it in part in demographics is that when the population increases, it is blocked when it reaches the limit (carrying capacity) above which the space becomes insufficient. The situation is completely different when it comes to beliefs, which tends on the contrary to increase when there are more believers...

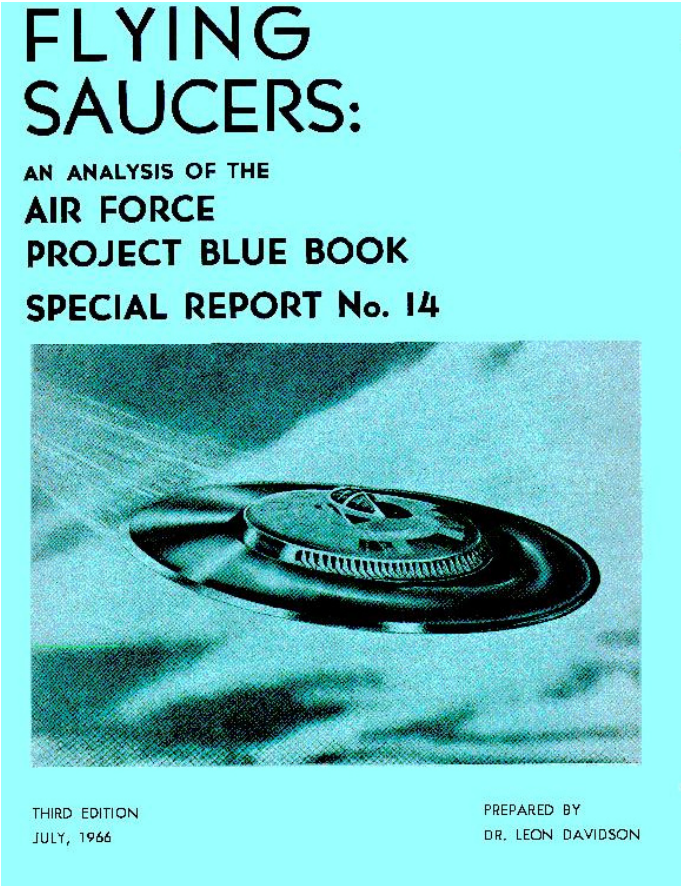
2. The Verhulst model is not, in any case (including demographics), a theoretical necessity. This law is purely an empirical law, as you can read in J.S. Cramer (2003) "The origins and development of the logit model" (available on the internet here : http://www.cambridge.org/resources/0521815886/1208_default.pdf), an article about the history of the function and of the logistic distribution.

3. And lastly, they are mathematical models that could be a priori adapted to the situation, but that Meessen doesn't even discuss. Those are contagion models. Nevertheless, those models, created to modelise the evolution of diseases, but also of beliefs or socio-economical behaviors, are still heavily debated by specialists. There is no emerging agreement, as you can read in Doddsa & Watts "A generalized model of social and biological contagion" (available on the internet here: http://research.yahoo.net/files/d_w_JTB.pdf), an article presenting some of those models.

In conclusion, it is clear that the claim made by Meessen is completely unsupported, and is only a case of "mathematical intimidation": the author counts on the lack of knowledge of the reader to impress him with mathematical formulae. We can also ponder why the name of Verhulst or the words "logistic distribution" are not written even once. Is it to avoid that the reader could easily have more information on the subject?

Editor note: I have to humbly admit that a great deal of the math involved here is beyond my limited education. The documents listed here are mathematically "intimidating " to those who are not familiar with the materials.

Project Bluebook Special Report No. 14: UFOlogical panacea or smokescreen?



....do UFO statistics represent a valid pursuit for more knowledge about this elusive phenomenon, or do they merely reflect frustration that none of the individual reports are capable of standing on their own two feet? Are UFO statistics a bold first step...or a desperate last resort? - Allan Hendry[1]

Project Bluebook's Special Report 14 is often presented by some UFOlogists as the holy grail of UFOlogy because of some "favorable" statistics that seemed to indicate good UFO reports are actual physical craft of some unknown origin. However, when one looks closely at the methodology, one begins to question these results.

More info does not always help

The Battelle Memorial Institute was responsible for the study that created this report. They evaluated over two thousand UFO reports in order to determine what might be learned from them. The study separated its reports into four categories. They were doubtful, poor, good, and excellent. According to the report, these values were judgements based on several factors:

1. *The experience of the observer deduced from his occupation, age, and training.*

2. *The consistency among the separate portions of the description of the sighting.*

3. *The general quality and completeness of the report.*

4. *Consideration of the observer's fact-reporting ability and attitude, as disclosed by his manner of describing the sighting.* [2]

The USAF claimed that if they had more information, they felt they could solve more of these cases. As a result, one would expect the Good and Excellent cases to have the lowest number of uknowns. However, this did not happen in the study. The opposite occurred (24.8% for Good and 33.3% for Excellent - see image to the right). UFOlogists have used these values as a club over the years to beat up the USAF and skeptics. To them it means there is something worth studying and these statistics prove it. However, did the Battelle study really prove anything at all?

GIGO?

What is not mentioned by UFOlogists is the problems associated with the classification of these reports. Experience has shown that occupation does not necessarily guarantee accurate observations and reliability (See Hynek's UFO report and Hendry's UFO Handbook). Additionally, just because a report is complete and full of details that sound consistent does not necessarily mean it is a "good" report. Writing for the Condon study, Dr. William Hartman noticed this when evaluating the Zond IV reports:

An effect important to the UFO problem is demonstrated by the records: the excited observers who thought they had witnessed a very strange phenomenon produced the most detailed, longest, and most misconceived reports, but those who by virtue of experience most nearly recognized the nature of the phenomenon became the least excited and produced the briefest reports. The "excitedness effect" has an important bearing on the UFO problem. It is a selection effect by which the least accurate reports are made more prominent (since the observer becomes

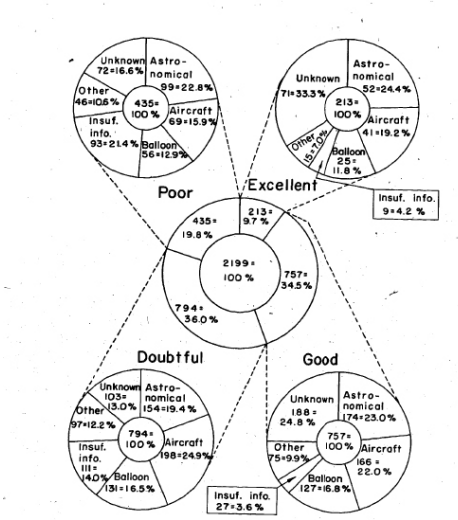


FIGURE 8 DISTRIBUTION OF OBJECT SIGHTINGS BY SIGHTING RELIABILITY GROUPS WITH EVALUATION DISTRIBUTIONS FOR EACH GROUP

highly motivated to make a report), while the most accurate reports may not be recorded. [3]

While the Battelle group did not have such information available to them, they did suspect it and tried to point it out (my emphasis in bold):

*...**the data were subjective,** consisting of qualified estimates of physical characteristics rather than of precise measurements. Furthermore, most of the reports were not reduced to written form immediately. The time between sighting and report varied from one day to several years. Both of these factors introduced an element of doubt concerning the validity of the original data, and increased it s subjectivity. This was intensified by the recognized inability of the average individual to estimate speeds, distances, and sizes of objects in the air with any degree of accuracy...**The danger lies in the possibility of forgetting the subjectivity of the data at the time that conclusions are drawn from the analysis. It must be emphasized, again and again, that the conclusions contained in this report are based NOT on facts, but on what many observers thought and estimated the true facts to be.*** (My emphasis in bold)[4]

So, when examining the "Good" and "Excellent" results, one has to be careful in assigning too much weight to the results obtained. One has to wonder how many of these "Good" and "Excellent" unknowns were reports written weeks, months, or even years after the actual event.

To top this off, one has to wonder how reports can be classified as "Good" or "Excellent" when some of these reports were described as "insufficient information" (3.6% for Good and 4.2% for Excellent)! How can they assign these classifications when the reports had "missing" information? How many of the "unknowns" in these categories had incorrect/missing information that prevented their identification? The world wonders....

Allan Hendry pointed out in his UFO Handbook that certain characteristics (shape and duration) were missing from about a fourth of all the UFO and IFO reports in the study:

...I would never have DREAMED of making IFO/UFO judgment without important parameters like shape or duration. Instead of dumping these reports into the "insufficient information" pile where they belong (or better yet, seeking out additional data) they saw fit to make commitments on them. To judge reports like these as "UFOs" and "IFOs" and to include them in chi-square tests is sloppy investigative and statistical process… [5]

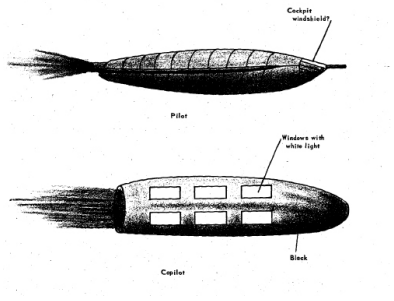
With all of this in mind, can we really draw any valid conclusions about this statistical study? Is it simply a case of Garbage in = Garbage out (GIGO)?

Reevaluation of the Unknowns

Something rarely mentioned by UFO proponents regarding Special report 14 is the attempt to reevaluate the 434 "unknowns" that were created by the initial evaluation. The effort was to identify "possible knowns", "unknowns", and "good unknowns". When all was said and done with this reevaluation, the report states:

Thus out of the 434 OBJECT SIGHTINGS that were identified as UNKNOWNS by the data reduction process, there were only 12 that were described with sufficient detail that they could be used in an attempt to derive a model of a "flying saucer". [6]

It is interesting to note that the reevaluation reduced the numbers of "unknowns" significantly. It doesn't say much for those 434 "unknowns" if a significant number could be considered to have reasonable explanations.



Additionally, the final twelve cases involved such events as the Chiles-Whitted sighting (above), which was probably a bright fireball. Remember, these are the cases that survived the culling and were considered the best. Many of these cases did not even end up on the final list of Bluebooks unknowns! If these cases were the best and found to have possible explanations, what does it say about the data originally used and the results obtained?

Flawed interpretation

The whole idea that Bluebook Special report #14 represents some sort of significance for UFO reports ignores a lot of what is known about people who report UFOs and the "data" that is in these reports. The study used a subjective methodology to classify and quantify the reports for analysis. The authors of the report recognized this and stated so. However, the UFO proponents, who like to interpret these results as something truly significant, seem to have ignored their warnings.

Notes and references

1. Hendry, Allan. The UFO Investigators Handbook. London: Sphere Books Ltd. 1980. p. 269

2. United States Air Technical Intelligence Center. Project Blue Book Special Report NO. 14: Analysis of Reports of Unidentified Aerial Objects. Project No. 10073. 5 May 1955. P. 11

3. Condon, Edward U., et al., eds. Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects. New York: Bantam, 1968. P. 574

4. United States Air Technical Intelligence Center. Project Blue Book Special Report NO. 14: Analysis of Reports of Unidentified Aerial Objects. Project No. 10073. 5 May 1955. P. 3-4

5. Hendry, Allan. The UFO Investigators Handbook. London: Sphere Books Ltd. 1980. p. 267

6. United States Air Technical Intelligence Center. Project Blue Book Special Report NO. 14: Analysis of Reports of Unidentified Aerial Objects. Project No. 10073. 5 May 1955. P. 77-78.

UFO over the Bronx and 1.3 million people miss it!

UFOlogist Joe Capp has his own UFO hotline in NY city. As a result, he seems to get many of the UFO reports and videos from the big apple. A recent blog entry of his included a lengthy video that peaked my interest as I wondered what it might be.

The video

The video was taken on September 26, 2010 by Cesar Guerrero. The video begins, according to the camera's clock, at approximately 8:31:54 PM. The witness states he saw the UFO while walking his dog and noticed its lighting was different than a helicopter. He estimated its location was between the Bronx and Manhattan but we have no idea where he was located or how he made this determination. One can only assume that he was looking in the direction of those two locations and determined it as the object being between the two. He also states that his niece should have seen it in Manhattan and her location indicates a SW viewing angle. Mr. Guerrero then concludes with the statement that a light came out from underneath the object and illuminated the clouds as it went towards New Jersey.

One thing about the video bothered me. In parts 1-3, we see the date/time stamp as September 26, 2010 until 9:22 PM. There is then some static/data loss and the video then starts up with the date/time stamp as November 20, 2010 10:11 PM. Either the date was changed or this was an entirely different event.

Capp's "investigation"

The first we hear about Joe Capp's investigation is a blog posting he made in April, where he proclaimed:

> *The person videoed a hovering Triangle (all 42 minutes of it) from his 26th floor balcony in the Bronx and his daughter of about 7 years was with him...I could give it to MUFON like the last video and never get it back or any returned email. But then I realized I have read so many debunkers statements and books that I knew what they would use to smear these people beforehand. I decided on the ways I would approach the situation to validate this video. I decided to send it off to a scientist I know who has done a great deal of optics work for the government. Meanwhile I would interview the witnesses with a hispanic translations and asked them all the right questions and the debunkers would ask.* [1]

When he presented the video he made the following statement, which is quoted in the part 1 of the video:

> *I sent this video to a scientist and he concluded it was "not a blimp, helicopter, plane, or hoax by Cesar." He also estimated the craft to be "larger than a helicopter". This is a true UFO.*[2]

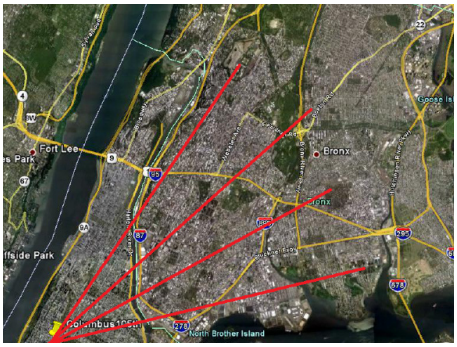
In his blog entry he stated this scientist commented that the lights surprised him. Apparently, the changing shape was something he could not explain.

Capp made the following final statement on his blog:

> *Maybe this time we can rise above the worst in us and deal with the facts of not only what the video shows but even how it came to light freely and with no other motives than the question, "could you tell me what this is?"*[3]

Missing data in his blog entry

Capp stated he would ask the pertinent details but he refused to give them on his blog. Missing were some basics. Perhaps a more precise location than "The Bronx", would be appropriate. Additionally, what direction were they looking? He states his niece in Manhattan should have seen it and she was located in the vicinity of 104th street and Columbus. Guerrero also felt the object was located between Manhattan and the Bronx. Based on this, one can only assume he was looking towards the south or southwest depending on where he was located. As a result, I created the general sighting lines for various locations in the Bronx looking towards the location of Guerrero's niece. It does not precisely point towards the UFO's location but it does give us an area to start working with (image created using Google earth).



The object

The video shows the object move about in a lazy pattern. What was an immediate red flag for me was the anti-collision strobe flashing away. Another red flag were the red and green lights that were visible. The green was on the left and the red was on the right when the object appeared to be pointed towards or away from the observer. If it were pointed towards the observer, then this is what one would expect for navigation lights. The green is on the starboard side and the red on the port. This indicates to me the object was man-made. Some of these lights were intermittently visible, indicating the shape of the object obscured these lights (especially the anti-collision strobe) as it moved about. There also was a dimmer light that seemed to be at the middle/front of the object. It is curious behavior for an object that seems to be hovering over a fixed location and moving about in back and forth motion. If this were a man-made object, what could maneuver like that and what was its purpose?

A hint

Probably the most important thing to look at is the date and time. What was happening in the Bronx/Manhattan area on September 26, 2010 between 8 and 10 PM?

Any fan will tell you that the Yankees vs. Red Sox is one of the biggest rivalries in baseball. They will also tell you that, like clockwork, they always seem to play on the weekend and on Sunday night at 8 PM with ESPN broadcasting the game. If the game is played in New York, it is at Yankee stadium in the Bronx, which is near three of the four general site lines I previously drew (See image on next page)! Of course, September 26th was a

Sunday night and there WAS a Yankees-Red Sox battle that night in New York (the image above comes from that game via the ESPN web site).

So, what does a Yankees-Red Sox game have to do with this UFO? Well, ESPN loves aerial shots of the area/stadium and they tend to use blimps. It was hard to determine if a blimp was present until Reality Uncovered member "Luck" found this December 7, 2010 news item describing a Goodyear blimp's latest adventure:

> *After floating over Red Sox and Yankees games in late September, Tropical Storm Nicole forced the big balloon into a three-day bypass down the Appalachians.*[4]

However, when I e-mailed Goodyear, they responded they had no blimps over Yankee stadium on the 26th. The representative of Goodyear stated that the blimp was present at a Yankees-Rays game earlier in the week. As a result, one has to consider that it is possible the Goodyear blimp was not present.

I checked on several other blimps. Metlife and Direct TV never responded to my queries. Direct TV is used often with Yankees games according to one New York writer. It seems identifying the offending blimp may not be possible without a video of that ESPN game. I knew I should have recorded all those Red Sox-Yankees games last year!

Even more interesting is that the November 20, 2010 section appears to have been recorded on another night, which means the date was not in error and was on November 20th. When one looks at sporting events at Yankee stadium on November 20th, we have a nationally televised (NBC) football game between Notre Dame and Army! There probably was a blimp at that game as well for the aerial shots.

All of these coincidences have to be considered when investigating this video. Could this "triangular UFO" have been nothing more than a blimp?

The "triangle" lights explained

There are several videos one can find on line showing the Goodyear blimp at night, which is probably very similar to other blimp lighting configurations. (One can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhtKjNHqsEQ) There are two anti-collision strobes. One is underneath and is weaker than the one on top. The front and rear of the blimp also have a solid light. There are standard navigation lights on the gondola and the tail fins.

There is also the Direct TV blimp, which is also used in Sunday night baseball games. Their lighting is a bit different than what I saw on the Goodyear blimp. They apparently do not have an anti-collision strobe on the bottom or turn it off when over sporting events. In this image I took from the June 19, 2010 Yankees-Cubs game, no anti-collision strobe was visible on the bottom of the blimp. However, the other lighting was visible.

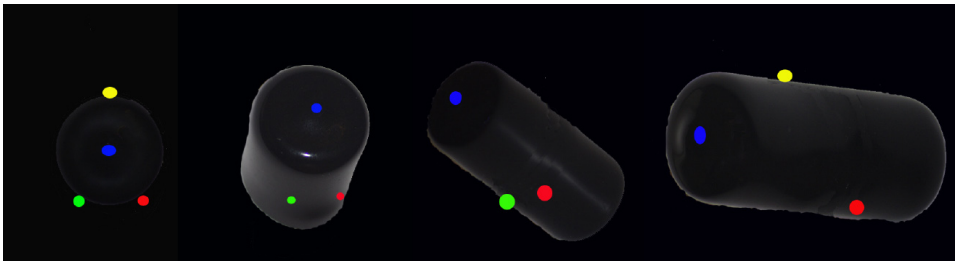
Once one sees the lighting, one can look at the UFO and see what is transpiring. As the blimp turns directly towards the camera, one is going to see the bright strobe on top, two navigation lights and a nose light (see the time stamp 8:46:17 in part 1 of the Cesar video on Capp's web site). When the blimp moves nose upward, the top strobe is obscured by the blimp and one only sees the nose light with the navigation lights (see 8:46:57). If it turns to port (see 8:46:21) or starboard (8:46:04), only one navigation light appears and the strobe is also visible on top. The nose light can also be seen. It is also possible that the blimp can be seen at an angle where both navigation lights and nose light can be seen without a strobe(8:46:57).

Weather underground states the winds were blowing from the NE at 10-14 mph. This means the blimp probably could just point towards the Northeast and station keep over the stadium moving back and forth from left to right. This explains why we always see the green light on the left and the red on the right. The blimp had no reason to turn around until it left.

Lastly, we are told that the witness noticed that, as the UFO left, it had a bright light come out of its bottom and illuminate the clouds. Hmmm.....could a blimp do that?

Frame grab of the Goodyear blimp at night. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhtKjNHqsEQ

These images show the various lighting configurations of the UFO between 8:46-8:47 PM. The Yellow light is the strobe light, the red and green lights are the actual color of the lights in that location. The blue light is a weaker light that is present. Looking at the Blimp lighting at upper right and one can easily visualize the following (going from left to right). Blimp starts with a view of the port side and nose pointed upward. As the nose drops and the blimp turns towards the camera, the strobe becomes visible. When viewed head on, the starboard Nav light (green becomes visible. The Blimp then turns to port and raises its nose again leaving us with the green and blue light. With the nose still up, it turns again towards the camera and reveals the port navigation light (red) again. The nose remains pointed upwards until it turns to starboard. At this point the nose drops and the strobe on top appears again. Compare this to the images I created at the top of the next page.



I created this series of images using photographs I took of a small cylinder to simulate the shape and lighting of a blimp. Compare these lighting configurations to those at the bottom of the previous page and the ones found in the video.

Contrary to the claims of the scientist, who seemed fascinated by the lights, they can be explained once the identity of the object is determined. Stating it could not be a blimp was premature and ignored the obvious clues of the navigation lights and the anti-collision strobe. Was the UFO trying to pretend to be a blimp? Maybe in addition to "fake airplanes", UFOs want to appear as "fake blimps".

It is not a blimp!

Joe Capp seems to feel any explanation other than an exotic craft is stating the witness is lying. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am only stating that the witness was simply mistaken and was not being dishonest. He obviously was not a baseball or football fan since the games were not on the television while he was recording the UFO. He may not even have known that Yankee stadium was in the direction he was recording. One can not find fault for an honest mistake by the witness.

That being said, I have less sympathy for those who chose to promote the video for something it wasn't. The "scientist" (we have no name or credentials presented so we have to question about his qualifications) deserves scorn simply because he did not really look at all the possibilities and chose to proclaim it could not be a blimp (assuming Capp did not exaggerate what the "scientist" told him). Capp also deserves criticism because he has dismissed any possibility of it being explained as demonstrated by his comments in a single post in the Reality Uncovered forum.

In his only statement about in the discussion, Mr. Capp attempted to downplay the blimp hypothesis. We were told that the witness could not see Yankee stadium from his window but that makes no sense. As one can see from the map on the previous page, the direction he described seems to point towards Yankee stadium. Either the witness does not have a good sense of direction or he should be able to see in the direction of Yankee stadium. Perhaps they are stating they can't physically see Yankee stadium from their window, which is very probable if they are over a mile away. When requests for location and direction of the video were requested, Capp chose not to respond and left the forum.

Capp promised that he would have his witness record a blimp and show it as a reference. He thinks such an endeavor will eliminate the blimp explanation. In my opinion, that may not be adequate because there are variables involved. Unless, he records the same kind of blimp at night under similar conditions (wind from NE, hovering over Yankee stadium, etc.), it will not look the same and may give a misleading result.

Or is it?

Last issue, I made it a point to mention that UFOs as "exotic craft" are never seen at major sporting events. Both of these events were nationally televised with dozens of high definition cameras positioned to record action inside and outside the stadium (including aerial shots!). Not once did anybody mention seeing any "exotic/unknown craft" hovering in the area of Yankee stadium or any place else in the Bronx. This means the UFO was something that was easily identifiable by the cameras, everybody driving on the highway, in the stadium, or out that night walking about in one of the world's most densely populated cities. The blimp (or some other conventional man-made aerial device) is a reasonable solution in this light.

I think this case can be considered mostly solved. The only thing missing is the culprit blimp/aircraft. However, if one can demonstrate that the witness was not shooting in the general direction of Yankee stadium (i.e to the north or east of the Bronx), I will reconsider this conclusion. I am sure Joe Capp will disagree but the video (which he states should be considered) and the facts surrounding it seem to indicate it was a blimp or otherman-made aircraft.

The will to believe

The problem with UFO proponents like Joe Capp is there appears to be no middle ground. Once he has established in his mind that the UFO is something truly exotic, any potential explanation is an attack on the integrity of the witness. This is followed by using the epithet of "debunker" to convince his readers the explanation if invalid. I guess Mr. Capp is practicing what Stanton Friedman accuses "debunkers" of doing. That being, "Don't bother me with the facts, my mind is made up".

Notes and References

1. Capp, Joseph. "NY UFO Hotline". UFO Media matters blog. April 27, 2011. Available WWW: http://ufomedia.blogspot.com/2011/04/ny-ufo-hotline.html

2. ibid.

3. Capp, Joseph. "NY UFO Hotline videos: Ceasar's video". UFO Media matters blog. May 23, 2011. Available WWW: http://ufomedia.blogspot.com/2011/05/ny-ufo-hotline-videos-cesars-video.html

4. Hiskey, Michelle. "Above Atlanta on the Goodyear blimp." ESPN Page 2. December 7, 2010. Available WWW: http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?id=5895989

An article inspired by an e-mail from Manuel Borraz

My IFO University article about the moon being reported as a UFO, inspired Manuel Borraz to e-mail me and mention a case that he believes was caused by the moon. He even gave the title for this article. So, I want to make sure he receives credit for inspiring me to do some writing about this case. I am sure the reader will find it interesting as well.

The Report

The story is told in J. Allen Hyenk's book, The UFO Report and is an interesting tale worth repeating. Hynek describes the story in a letter to Major Quintanilla. It is only mentioned as a sighting in the Bluebook archive in a list of sightings for November 1-4, 1957. Apparently, it came from a news clipping and was never investigated by Blue Book. Considering the amount of information in the newspapers I examined, it seems that it was really not worth the effort and was overshadowed by the "wave" of sightings that had occurred during this time period as people began looking up at the new Sputnik satellite:

> *The men said they spotted the object, which changed shape and seemed to dim the lights on a squad car, but apparently they were the only witnesses. Elmwood Park police officials said they received no calls about the object, nor was it spotted by any of the military, or federal agencies which keep watch over the skies.*[1]

Hynek apparently learned about the case when he became involved in the filming of a 1965 NBC program in Chicago.

> *At about 3:00AM, a squad car was patrolling the alleyway behind a row of stores on Belmont st. they had proceeded about two blocks down the alley (the total length of which was nearly a mile), when they perceived an open window in the back of one of the stores. The stopped to examine it with their spotlight, but just then the spotlight and their headlights dimmed very much, so much so that the officer said that a match would have been brighter. This being the case, they took a flashlight from the car and went out to examine the window and to look under the hood. At this time, they said they noticed a bright spherical object above and ahead of them. I questioned them very long on the size and appearance and the best I could get was that it was like an iridescent orange beach ball except much larger... As the object moved down the alley, but above the alley, the car lights came back on. The engine, however, never stalled but kept going the whole time. They trailed the object and whenever they turned their lights off, the object seemed to hover, and so to speak, watch them. As soon as they turned their lights on, the object moved off.*
>
> *The men trailed down the alley for fully a half-mile to the end of the alley where it met a cemetery. They paused at the end and turned their lights off. The object slowly descended and hovered just a few feet off the ground. Officer ___ kicked on the "brights" and the object ascended very rapidly "fifty or sixty miles an hour". It also took off westward. The officers now jogged right for a quarter of a block to join Belmont street and pursued the object down Belmont Street. Here officer___said that it cavorted from curb to curb back and forth as though "playing games with them". The fireman maintained that he object was higher up.*
>
> *The color or brightness never changed throughout the entire episode, which lasted some ten to fifteen minutes. There is a stand of trees in the cemetery and alongside Belmont on both sides. The object periodically became lost behind the trees. After about a mile and a half, they made a U-turn and came back east on Belmont, having lost sight of the object. As they got back into Elmwood Park, the object approached them from the left from a stand of trees, passed over them and to the rear. They made another U-turn and pursued the object again westward. Very soon after this, they said the object ascended to a great height.*
>
> *Officer....said to about five thousand (5,000) feet., but this may or may not be the case since I do not particularly rate his judgement about dimension, or facts for that matter, very high. But both the fireman and the officer agreed that the object disappeared as though a person pulled a black shade up from the bottom, or as though one were filling the spherical object with a black ink. .....The object was described as bright but not hard on the eyes, and very beautiful....*
>
> *.....According to the men, the moon was out that night, but to the east, whereas the object at that same time was toward the west. The sky was basically clear, although there was a fog in the cemetery.*
>
> *One primary incident occurred when the squad car had stopped at the end of the first long alley just before they jogged on into Belmont street. The lights were out and the object was descending. At this time, it lost its circular shape and took on a cigar shape surrounded by a fogginess which seemed to emanate from the object itself. There was disagreement as to how much fog, if any, there was in the cemetery that night. The crucial time of the incident seems to have been when the officer kicked on the lights as the object was descending and had assumed a cigar shape. As soon as the lights came on, the object rose rapidly, resumed its circular shape, and sucked up the fogginess around it.*
>
> *One other high spot occurred apparently just before the second U-turn when the*

squad car was going east on Belmont. The object came at them from the woods to the left, and according to Officer.....came so close to the car, that he could have reached out and touched it. The fireman did not agree, feeling that the object had always maintained a respectable distance...

No sound or noise was ever associated with the object. It seemed to glow and its color was compared by both men to the color of a setting sun but not as bright....

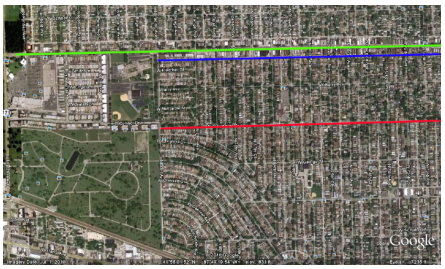
One other item:....said that his "hair stood one end" when he saw the object, and the other officer said that....wanted to shoot at it, but was cautioned by Officer... not to shoot unit he knew more about it.

Meteorological conditions for this night should be checked to be compared with similar data from Levelland.....[2]

Who, when, where.

What you find on the vast web is mostly people copying various sources on this case. The problem is, are these original sources reliable? The names of the individuals involved vary depending on the source. The UP wire story in 1957 identified the individuals as four people. Three policemen (Joseph Lukasek, Clifford Shaw, and Daniel Digiovanni) and one fireman (Robert Volz).[3] Hynek did not include names but implied there were only three witnesses. Brad Sparks identifies the witnesses as policemen Joseph Lusasek and Clifford Scahu. The fireman was identified as Daniel De Giovanni. Either the UP story was inaccurate or the names became garbled in the retellings by other authors. The time of the sighting seems to jump about. Nothing is listed in the Bluebook or News accounts of the day. Hynek puts it at around 3:00 AM. Others list it around 3:15 AM. It is safe to say the events probably transpired between 3 and 3:30 AM. So, we are left with conflicting information on the who and exactly when.

However, location does not seem to be that much a problem. We are told they were in an alley that paralleled Belmont street/avenue in Elmwood Park, Illinois. One would think that would not be hard to identify. Brad Sparks states they were on W. Wellington Avenue. While this parallels Belmont street/avenue, it is two full blocks south of Belmont. Hynek's letter states that they went to the end of the alley and then only went a quarter block to get onto Belmont. He also mentions that the alley was about a mile long. Perhaps it was the statement that the alley ended into a cemetery that got Sparks onto W. Wellington Ave. because the alley that is only a quarter block from Belmont ends at a Catholic high school (Guerin prep high school) and not a cemetery (see image above).



Elmwood park as it appears on Google earth. The green road is Belmont. The red line is West Wellington Ave and the blue line is an alley that parallels Belmont by a quarter block.

Intrigued by this, I decided to see when the school came into being. It was initially two schools that existed there. One was a boys (Holy Cross) and the other a girls high school (Mother Theodore Guerin High School). They combined in 2004, when the boy's school enrollment numbers became too low to support it. These schools opened in 1961 and 1962. Where they there in 1957? That is hard to say but aerial photographs of the area in 1951 and 1962 reveals that there was just a field, which was attached to the cemetery. For the police officer's it may have appeared to be part of the cemetery. Therefore, it seems likely that the actual alley is the one about a half to a quarter block south of Belmont. The alley happens to be about a mile long just like Hynek said.

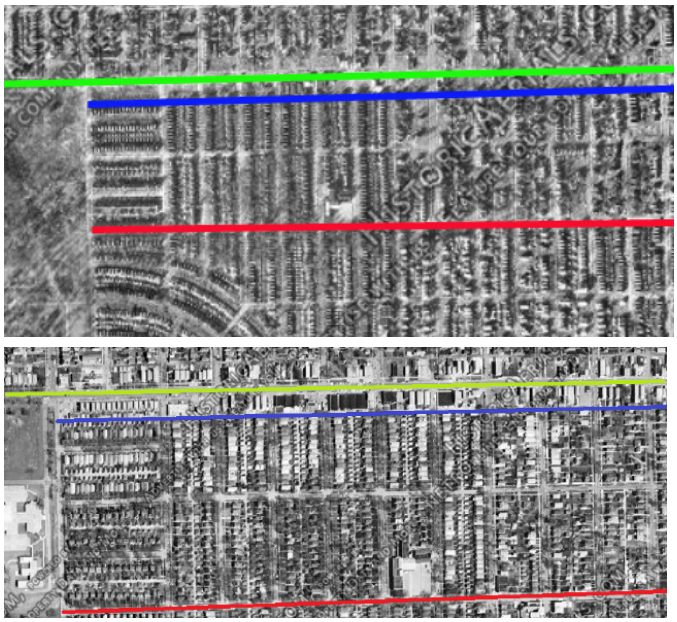
The exact location of the police officers is harder to determine but it seems like they were about a half-mile from the end of the alley, which happens to be at the intersection of the alley with N. Oriole Ave/N 76th Ave. This is a ball park location but seems reasonable.

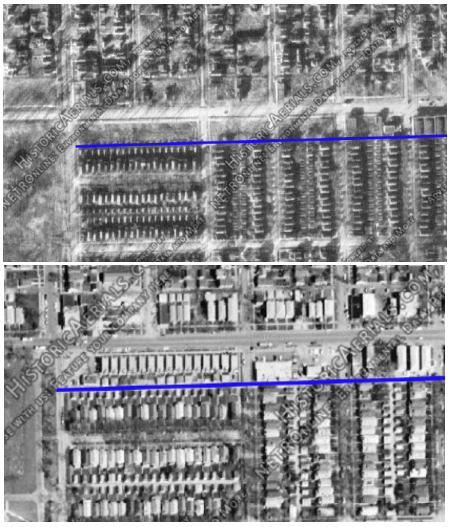
The moon connection

Now comes for the potential solution mentioned by Manuel Borraz in his e-mail to me and on UFO Updates on October 28, 2000. That answer was they might have been pursuing the setting moon.

At 3:00 AM, the moon was at an azimuth of 271.5 degrees and an angle of elevation of about 4.5 degrees. By 3:30 AM, it set at an azimuth of 275 degrees. It was a waxing gibbous moon that was almost circular in shape. Most curious are the comments by the witnesses who stated the moon was in the eastern sky at the time of the event. At least that is where they thought it was located.

The alley and Belmont Street/Avenue itself was at an azimuth of about 268 degrees, which means the moon was only


Elmwood park as it appeared in 1951 (top) and 1962 (bottom). The alley and roads are marked with the appropriate colors as before.



The amount of building construction along the alley way can be seen between 1951 (top) and 1962 (bottom). There are hardly any buildings between Belmont and the alley in 1951. The amount of buildings in 1962 is less than those that are presently lining the road.

slightly off to the right of their westward direction of travel at 3AM.

Brad Sparks is the only person I know that has argued against the moon hypothesis (others don't bother to mention it). He remarks in his 1600 Bluebook unknowns:

> *W, at about 274°-275° setting at 276° at about 3:30 a.m., 90% full, and street oriented to 268° so moon not visible through ½ mile of buildings lining alleyway of W. Wellington Ave.*[4]

We know that Sparks location of W. Wellington Ave. is incorrect so how is his argument that the 1/2 mile of buildings lining the alleyway? The first problem is his claim of 1/2 mile of buildings. Were there buildings the entire length of the alleyway? In the 1962 aerial photographs we see most of Belmont St./Ave. lined with buildings (those that would have interfered with the view of the moon) of various sizes. However, this is five years after the fact and the aerial photograph of 1951 shows very few building lining the street. One can only assume that the actual number of buildings was something in between the two photographs. These means that one can not definitively state that the buildings would have blocked the policemen's view.

Additionally, how much interference could the buildings have if the sighting initially occurred at 3:00 AM as Hynek implied. A building of 20 foot height 300 feet away would have an angular height of less than 4 degrees. With an azimuth of 271-272 degrees, the angle would have not gone directly over the buildings that lined Belmont St./Ave but the rear areas, which could include parking lots where nothing existed to block the view of the moon. Therefore, it seems probable that the witness could have seen the moon above the rooftops. Even more important is when they got to the end of the alley, there was nothing but an open field/cemetery. The moon would have been much more obvious to them but they missed it and stated it was in the eastern sky!

There are better arguments against the moon hypothesis than the buildings potentially blocking the moon but it means the witnesses would have been very accurate in their observations. Hynek stated he had problems accepting the judgements made by one of the officers so one has to question the reliability of the witness reports to some extent.

Nobody is stating the moon influenced the headlights, was rising up, or zig-zagging across the road/over the car. However, the car's motion, U-turns, detour onto Belmont from the Alley, and how far down Belmont they went (The road splits and changes direction to an azimuth of about 292 degrees 2 miles west of the cemetery/field) might explain some of these observations. We do not know what the condition of the car's engine and battery were for the other effects since it was never properly investigated. It seems that many of the reported effects might have perfectly logical explanations.

The alley as it appears today using google maps. Note that the buildings are not that high and can be distant at times depending on what position along the alley the observer is located.

Was it the moon?

We can't say for certain they actually chased the moon that morning but one has to examine the possibilities. The fact the policemen never saw the moon (and even gave the wrong location for it) is an indicator that it could have been the moon they were chasing. I doubt this will change the minds of those who want to declare this an "unknown" but, in my opinion, this is a reasonable explanation for the case.

Notes and references

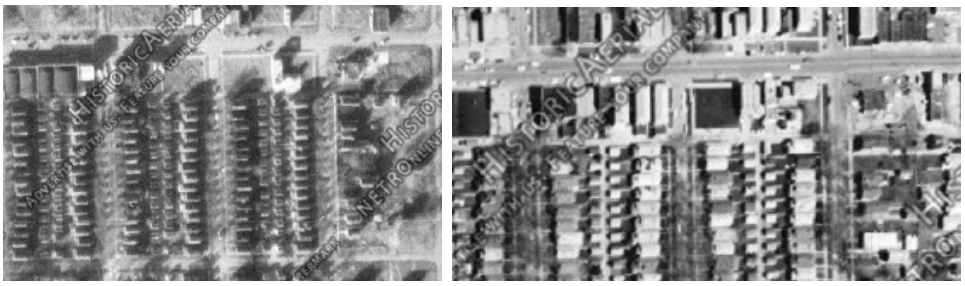
1. "Radar tracks object over Gulf of Mexico" Racine Journal Times November 5, 1957. Page 2

2. Hynek, J. Allen. The Hynek UFO Report. New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1997. P. 162-6

3. "Chicago area police chase air object" Pacific stars and stripes Nov 5, 1957 page 3

4. Sparks, Brad. Comprehensive catalogue of 1,600 Project Blue Book UFO unknowns: Work in progress (version 1.16 October 2, 2009). Available WWW: http://www.cufos.org/BB_Unknowns.pdf

All aerial images came from the web site: http://historicaerials.com/



The arrangement of buildings between the alley and Belmont where the police officers probably (based on Hynek's description) first reported the UFO in 1951 (left) and 1962 (right)

Annie Jacobsen's Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base (Little, Brown and Company, May 2011) has generated a fire storm of controversy concerning the author's journalistic credibility, since it became apparent that she had obscured the Cold War heroics of Area 51 veterans in a noxious stew of Nazi atrocities, Soviet plots, and hoaxed flying saucers.

After gaining the trust of the Roadrunners, members of an Area 51 alumni organization, Jacobsen spent about two years writing what she claimed would be the first true history of Area 51, as told to her by the men who worked there during the Cold War era. It was a golden opportunity to do something no one had ever done before, and she squandered it for the sake of sensationalism in the guise of "investigative journalism."

On Memorial Day several weeks after the book's release, Roadrunners president T.D. Barnes wrote on his blog, "We took Mrs. Jacobsen into our homes and told her our life history that led to our being proud participants in the ultra secret activities at Area 51. We introduced her to our contemporaries, something that most of us had never done before. After 50 years of silence, we sought to allow our brothers the opportunity to finally tell about the major contributions recently declassified that we, as a band of brothers, made to our nation's wars. In a domino like effect, each of us opened the doors of others who took our lead in the telling of their personal sacrifices and contributions to past wars, including the Cold War, and to our nation's future wars to keep us free."

But, Jacobsen chose to bury these stories within an improbable narrative involving claims by a single anonymous source (the only source not named in the book) that Area 51 was created in response to the "Roswell Incident," and that the events of July 1947 that briefly ignited the nation's interest in "flying disks" was actually the result of a plot by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin to cause panic in the West, akin to that caused by the 1938 radio broadcast of "War of the Worlds." The details of this complex web of conspiracy included Nazi scientists, genetic experiments on children, German airplane designers, secret military bases, and accusations that the U.S. government hid the truth to cover its own hideous experiments.

It is no surprise that the Roadrunners feel betrayed. According to Barnes, "Jacobsen and her publisher completely changed the focus of her book from one of heroics to one of horror and fantasy." He noted that the Roadrunners felt that, "Our valor has been stolen by an author who refuses to repent her literary crimes and errors."

For a book that is supposedly about Area 51, it is surprising how many pages are devoted to unrelated subjects. Much of this material is, however, used to set up the climactic finale. The first chapter is devoted to giving credence to the claims of Robert Lazar, and includes Stanton Friedman's take on Roswell. Although the author allows Friedman to disparage Lazar's claims, Jacobsen seems to imply that she believes that Lazar worked at or near Area 51. Frankly, all the UFO lore is so peripheral to Groom Lake history that it could have been left out entirely without detracting from the narrative. After all, there are UFO stories connected to Edwards Air Force Base but you never see them mentioned in any serious book or documentary about Edwards.

Without even mentioning Area 51, Chapter Two sets the stage for the ludicrous Roswell tale that is fleshed out later in the book. This section also suggests that, "the crash remains from Roswell quickly fell into the blackest regions of government." Conspiracy theorists, rejoice!

Chapter Three is straightforward history, making it one of the stronger sections of the book. Unfortunately it also contains factual errors that could have been easily checked and corrected prior to publication.

The fourth chapter again drags the reader into UFO territory not relevant to Area 51 other than to suggest that high-altitude aircraft from Nevada were responsible for many UFO sightings. This chapter again raises the specter of Nazis, Soviets, and the Horten brothers who designed advanced aircraft for Hitler during World War Two, along with the specious premise that the Roswell debris was shipped to a secret base in Nevada in 1951. Jacobsen also builds up the forthcoming Stalin UFO hoax nonsense and drags the reader through a primer on Project Bluebook/Sign/Grudge, etc., that would be better suited to a different book altogether.

The fifth and sixth chapters are on firmer ground with a historical narrative but are, yet again, rife with factual errors. There are misleading statements like a description of Project 57, an April 1957 weapon safety experiment, as a "dirty bomb" and describing the event as the first of its kind (there were four the previous year).

Chapters Seven and Eight are mostly pretty solid, factually, but anyone with knowledge of the subject matter will regret the author's lost opportunities. There are a few glaring errors, such as saying that Area 51's runway is "believed to be the longest in the world." Reference material for some information presented in this chapter appears to include articles posted on the Dreamland Resort web site, but there are no footnotes citing sources.

Chapter Nine is satisfactory except for drifting away from Area 51 toward the end, and into some nuclear testing history outside of Nevada. This digression seems mostly to be an excuse to dredge up Nazis again through a Wernher von Braun connection.

The next two chapters are mostly pretty good but still plagued with factual errors that appear to be the result of relying on

single sources without any effort to double-check or corroborate details. Several myths, now disproven, are repeated for another generation of readers (President Lyndon Johnson supposedly reversing the letters of RS-71 to SR-71 in a speech, for example).

Toward the end of Chapter Twelve, Jacobsen drags up the mythical Horten/Roswell connection again to bolster her source's claim that the brothers designed an advanced aircraft to simulate an extraterrestrial craft for Stalin's minions to crash under remote control on U.S. soil. It is ironic that part of the chapter is devoted to an explanation of "Ockham's razor" (the idea that the simplest explanation is usually correct) when Jacobsen clearly fails to apply this principle to her anonymous source's convoluted Roswell tale.

Chapters Thirteen through Seventeen are everything this book should have been. There are a few minor glitches but no "show stoppers." The reader is again subjected to factual errors, and Chapter Thirteen contains another lengthy aside on nuclear testing in the Pacific that seems largely unnecessary.

The book goes off the rails in Chapter Eighteen with more misleading statements, factual errors, and a general lack of knowledge on the part of the author regarding the subject matter. This chapter includes some great stories but they have nothing to do with Area 51.

In Chapter Nineteen the reader is introduced to some of the wilder allegations about Area 51. Perhaps this chapter would have been a good place to summarize and debunk all of the conspiracy theories surrounding the secret base and leave it at that. Unfortunately this is the chapter where Jacobsen casts the Atomic Energy Commission/Department of Energy as the villain in a diabolical web of deception and human experimentation, and sets the stage for the most controversial elements of the book.

But first, the author opens Chapter Twenty with, "What happened at Area 51 during the 1980s? Most of the work remains classified and very little else is known." She immediately gives lie to this statement by going on to describe testing of stealth prototypes, foreign aircraft, and unmanned vehicles that took place during the time in question. There are, as usual, factual errors both minor and egregious.

The author's conspiracy tree finally bears fruit in Chapter Twenty-One. After a lengthy discussion of drones, satellites, and secrecy, Jacobsen hangs her reputation on the most outlandish Area 51 story ever foisted upon the unsuspecting public. Worse yet, it is based on the testimony of a single person whose identity is concealed from the reader. This ludicrous tale, presented as fact despite a paucity of evidence and total lack of corroboration, is a twisted conflation of Cold War paranoia, Communist/Nazi conspiracies, human experimentation, and U.S. government cover-up. It posits an improbable plot to try to cause a panic in America by crashing a fake flying saucer (with fake alien crew of genetically engineered deformed human children) in the most remote part of the southwestern U.S. where the wreckage wasn't found or reported for days. Wouldn't New York or Washington, D.C., have been more logical targets?

This framework is used to set up EG&G and the Atomic Energy Commission as villains participating in a cover-up in order to protect the alleged fact that the U.S. was "doing the same thing."

Despite being confronted with inconvenient facts and criticism that her narrative is poorly sourced and unverifiable, Jacobsen has defended her work. She told Bill Weir of ABC's Nightline, "I'm not sure if it's my job to prove it, I do know that it was my job to report it, and that's what I did."

Weir managed to set up an off-camera interview with the Jacobsen's anonymous source. Afterward, he described this source as seeming confused, telling conflicting accounts, and saying he was motivated to tell his story, "in order to help Annie's book."

In an interview with Fresh Air's Terry Gross, explaining why she added the Roswell story to the book, Jacobsen said, "I made a decision to write about this in the very end of the book, after I take the traditional journalist form of telling you everything in the third person, I switch and I kind of lean into the reader and I say, 'Look, this is not why Area 51 is classified to the point where no one in the government will admit it exists. The reason is because what one man told me.' And then using the first person, I tell you what I was told."

The author told Earl Swift of Popular Mechanics magazine, "I absolutely stand by the veracity of what he told me, which is that something did crash in New Mexico; it was taken to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base; and then in 1951, it was transported to the Nevada desert. Hence, that is why Area 51 has the name Area 51."

Like other elements of the story, this does not withstand scrutiny. Jacobsen's logic falls flat upon examination. One has only to study some of the other "Areas" in Nevada that were also designated by the AEC/DOE. For example, Area 52 (Tonopah Test Range) was established in 1956. A series of nuclear safety experiments called Project 56 took place at Area 11 in 1956. Area 13, just northwest of Groom Lake, was established in 1957 for the sole purpose of conducting the Project 57 safety experiment. Although the boundaries of the Groom Lake test site were established when it was built in 1955, it was not designated Area 51 until the 38,400-acre block of land was formally added to the atomic proving ground in June 1958. Finally, Area 58 (Central Nevada Test Area) was established in 1967.

In his May 27 blog entry, Anthony Bragalia revealed Jacobsen's source to be Alfred O'Donnell, a retired EG&G employee who spent many years working at the Nevada Test Site. O'Donnell, 89, joined EG&G in 1947 and is the last living person to have witnessed the first atomic test in Nevada in 1951. While his background checks out, his story has more holes than Yucca Flat. Unfortunately, this is what will make the most lasting impression upon readers of Jacobsen's book. True stories of the real Cold War heroes of Area 51 are lost amidst the conspiracy rant

UFOs on the tube

Area 51 Declassified

I was a bit disappointed in this show as my expectations were high. However, I think the show did accomplish its purpose in educating what happened at Area 51 in the 1950s and 60s.

First of all, I have to give praise to all the people that spoke on the program. Anybody who has been involved in classified programs understand what these men endured. As a submariner, who has gone on classified missions before, I understand completely the dedication that was required of them. Not being able to discuss this with family members all those years must have been hard to do.

Listening to all these retired gentlemen speak about their experiences can send chills up your spine. They did not receive any hero's recognition even though they participated in a program that was critical in prevented the cold war from turning into a "hot" one. We should all be grateful for their efforts. Though their flights were considered controversial, they helped preserve the peace at a time when the world was on the edge of nuclear Armageddon.

The U-2 part of the program was very interesting but added very little to what was already known about the testing that was involved. They repeated the story about U-2 flights being mistaken for UFOs. I am sure that the U-2 was reported as a UFO on occasion but it probably was not very often as claimed. They simply accepted the CIA's history about U-2s written by Gregory Pedlow and Donald Welzenbach, where the claim was first made (Haines would later site this history in his article on the subject). It really is an anecdote and it would be interesting to see how many UFO reports made were actually U-2/Oxcart flights. I wonder how hard it would be to acquire a catalogue of all the U-2 flights in the 1950s?

The Oxcart/SR-71 part of the program was interesting in how they showed the first unit was shipped to Area 51 for testing. Even more interesting were the efforts by the men at Area 51 to keep the craft hidden from Soviet Satellites while being tested in the open. I particularly enjoyed the trick of hand painting silhouettes on the runway and then using hot air blowers to simulate engines that have been run recently. I wonder how often the Soviets were fooled by this ruse?

I found the story about the SR-71 crash site in Utah to be interesting. Readers of SUNlite would be familiar with it after Peter Merlin provided an article in SUNlite 1-4. Most fascinating in the program were the photographs that were shown of the recovery efforts. It amazes me how people can still believe that the Roswell debris was completely cleaned up after examining what happened here. Despite a herculean effort conducted by the CIA to remove evidence of the crashed plane, Peter Merlin could still identify the impact crater and recover parts over four decades after the event. Why is it that the Roswell crash site mysteriously vanished off the face of the earth in aerial photographs taken just a few years later and small pieces have not been found by at least two organized efforts to do so.

Peter Merlin deserves a lot of credit for his tenacity in researching all these crash sites. They even had him doing some digging at the site, revealing various bits of debris that still could be found (Peter assured me this was not staged like the Discovery channel show). There was no effort to "mystify" any debris he recovered. Roswellites could learn a thing or two from Mr. Merlin and the background surrounding this plane crash.

Despite my reservations about the program's content, it did do well in presenting its case. No effort was made to exaggerate any claims and it demystified some of the Area 51 folklore. Peter Merlin stated there was a similar good showing on one of the History Channel's "state" shows about Nevada. Perhaps the UFO-Area 51 connection will be severed as these revelations of what really transpired become public knowledge. It is worth watching. If you missed it, you can watch it at http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/episode/area-51-declassified-4968/Overview#tab-Videos/10230_00

Book Reviews

Buy it! (No UFO library should do without it)

The UFO Experience - Dr. J. Allen Hynek

Of all of Hynek's published books, this gives the greatest insight into his experience and thinking on the subject. I found his interpretation of Bluebook's officers somewhat biased. This is not unusual for scientists and military men to think differently. One can read the other side of the coin in Quintanilla's unpublished manuscript.

Borrow it. (Worth checking out of library or borrowing from a friend)

The UFO report - Dr. J. Allen Hynek

This book is more a collection of anecdotes than anything else. Some of them are interesting but others are really just sensationalized for effect. I did find his "reevaluation" of bluebook cases informative but it was somewhat brief. I think the book would have been better if he just spent the entire book on the reevaluation of the cases.

Bin it! (Not worth the paper it is written upon - send to recycle bin)

Night Siege - Dr. J. Allen Hynek, Phillip Imbrogno, Bob Pratt

When you have Dr Hynek as one of the authors, I would expect more. This book documents the Hudson Valley UFO wave of the early 1980s but does little more than that. The authors provide us very little in the way of analysis of the data. Missing are the obvious information from these sightings such as angular sizes, speeds, elevations, azimuths, etc. I would expect an astronomer like Hynek to have obtained such information. Instead of this data, we see in the scientific analysis section the usual UFO descriptions where people make vague estimates of size and speed. Can one really call this science? To me, it appears more like the UFOlogical attempt to sensationalize a case in order to promote the researcher. Luckily, I bought this at a used book store because at full price it would have been a rip-off.